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A hefty Pacific sailfish on the verge of a successful release.

PHOTO BY: Gerhard Laubscher

JIM HENDRICKS


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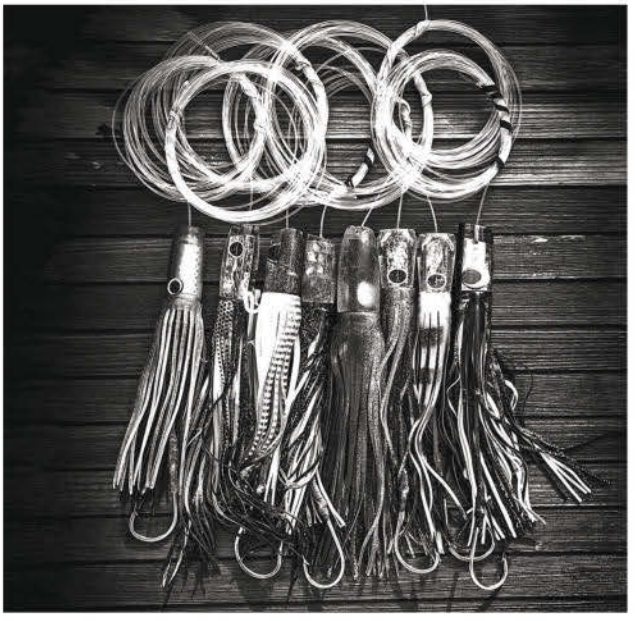
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EXPERT TIP



Manage extra-long leaders while keeping them ready for fast deployment.

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84 / STAMAS 390 AEGEAN
Jim Hendricks

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BLUE MOOD



GLENN LAW

This month as we go to press, summer lassitude has set in. Conservation battles simmer on the back burner, however briefly, and the long days and calm seas make it tough to stay indoors.

But we're excited about this Offshore Issue we're wrapping up. I'm especially enthusiastic as I've been able, uncustomarily, to spend a fair amount of time offshore in the past couple of months.

In the fishing-media business, when we tell people what we do for a living, their reaction is generally, "So all you do is fish?" The truth is, we mostly sit in front of a computer. Just like many of you, I suspect.

I tell myself I'm actually in training when I sit at my desk all day. And sure enough, when I get out on the blue water and I'm hooked up and ready to do battle, my chair skills are honed. That part I have down. It's the other million details that make up offshore fishing that continually offer up lessons and experiences that keep me intrigued.

Offshore is a capricious arena, constantly changing. It may change over the course of a day, a series of days, or even years. Case in point: One of our feature stories this month details summertime fishing for sailfish, a species that traditionally has been Florida's premier winter fishery. Has this changed because natural cycles have shifted, or because the way we fish and our approach and collective body of knowledge have opened new doors? Questions like this define the fascination.

I have yet to meet an offshore captain who won't acknowledge they learn something every day. Even when it's slow; when the currents are wrong, when the water goes off color, when bait seems to have vacated the planet, the birds doze on flotsam and it seems you're trolling over a blank ocean, you never doubt why you are there.

At times like that, it doesn't matter how far you've traveled to get there, or how much it has cost you, though for some that seems to be a mandatory correlation. I never understood the "I spent a lot of money and traveled a long way to get here, so I better catch something," mentality. You've spent a lot of money and traveled a long way for the privilege of being there and, if all goes well, the opportunity to pit your skills against a spectacular quarry. If you expect to buy fish, go to the fish market. Blue water drills that lesson home.

I recall the modus of the charter boats in the Mexican Caribbean several (actually multiple several) years ago. They'd take the tourists out, troll heavy lines for sailfish, and when a fish struck, hit the throttles and skid the fish along the surface until the "sports" could reel it in. Really gave them their money and effort's worth, right?

It's far more interesting to watch an angler new to blue water, and to circle hooks, proclaim, "I'm gonna hook my own fish. If the mate picks up the rod, he can reel the fish in himself." Then watch him whiff five blue marlin in a row. I'm just glad it wasn't me. Of course, I've never whiffed a billfish.

Or to watch a mate learn the hard way that chafed leaders need to be replaced before the fish of the day bites.

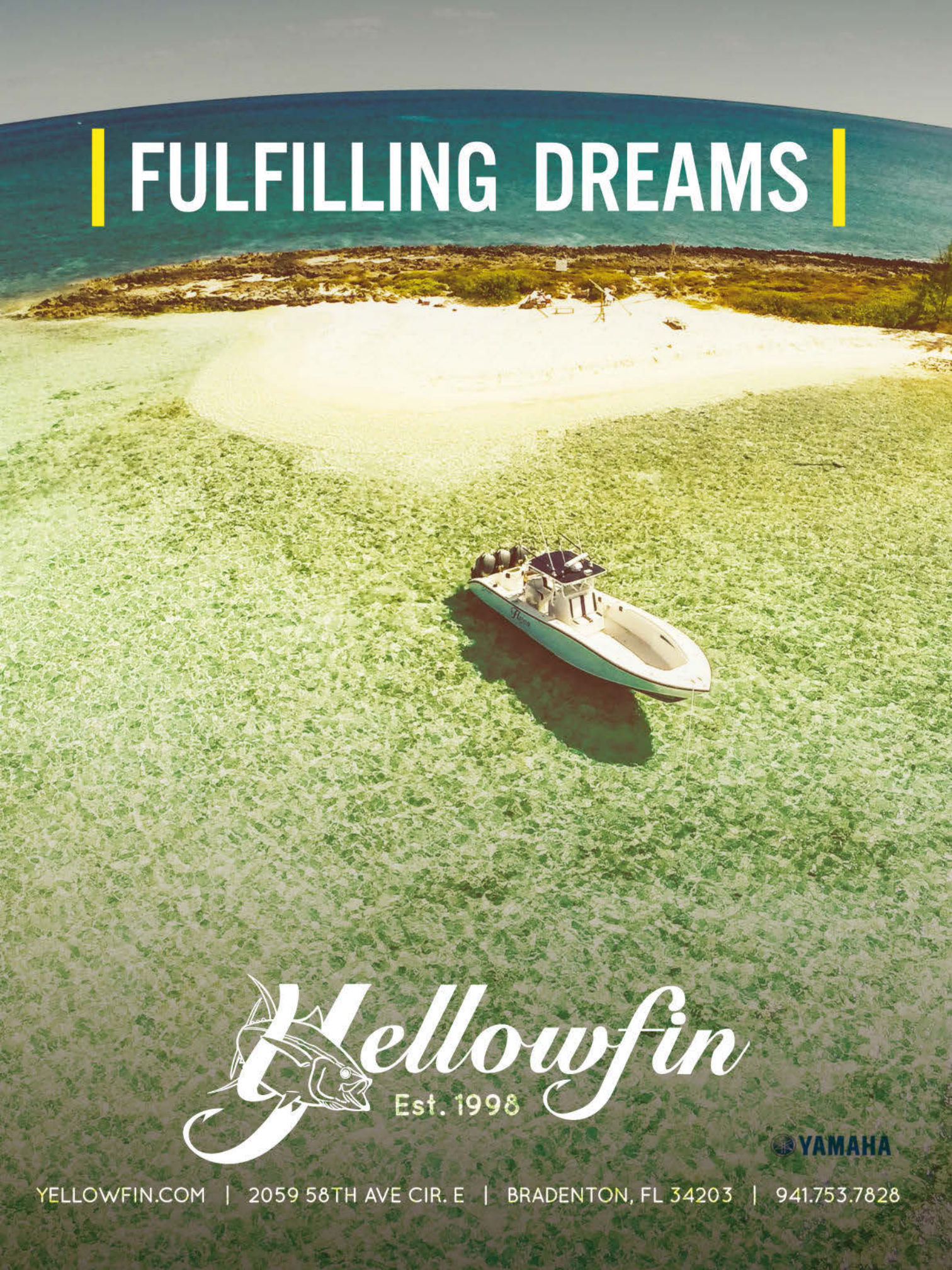
When you stay open to learning new things, it's always an adventure offshore, no matter what the tally at the end of the day. We think we've put together a lineup of information this month to boost your offshore learning curve, add a few more tools to your box, and direct your eyes to the horizon. At the very least, it should give you something to look forward to when you're sitting at your desk, staring at your computer screen.



GERHARD LAUBSCHER

SITTIN' PRETTY: After months of rigorous training, the author pits his finely honed chair-sitting skills against a 300-pound blue marlin.

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FEDERAL COUNCILS IN CONJUNCTION WITH FLORIDA DEVELOP JOINT MANAGEMENT GOALS



LOCAL WATERS: Biscayne National Park offers unmatched angling opportunity.

JUDD PATTERSON, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NEWS LINES

NO FISHING IN POPULAR NATIONAL PARK WATERS

The National Park Service recently announced its final General Management Plan (GMP) for Biscayne National Park. Despite commitments made by park officials to work with stakeholders and the state of Florida to explore less restrictive options, the GMP includes a marine reserve that eliminates fishing and restricts boating in over 10,000 acres of the Park's most popular marine waters.

For the past several years, the recreational boating and fishing community submitted comments, attended public meetings and organized discussions with the leadership at the National Park Service to balance the critical need for conservation with the need for recreational access to BNP waters. Numerous fishery-management measures were presented to the National Park Service, including size limits, bag limits, quotas, permits, seasonal closures and gear restrictions.

"The announcement confirms that Biscayne National Park officials never had any real interest in working with stakeholders or the state of Florida to explore compromise plans," said Mike Leonard, ocean resource policy director for the American Sportfishing Association. "The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, one of the nation's leading fisheries-management agencies, has stated that a marine reserve is far too restrictive, and that


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other management measures can achieve goals while still allowing for public access."

"Anglers recognize that the condition of the fisheries resources in Biscayne National Park needs to be addressed, but we know that once an area is closed, the public will never be allowed back in," said Jeff Miller, chairman of Coastal Conservation Association Florida's Government Relations Committee. "These decisions should happen only when clearly supported by science, and when all other options have failed. By not giving less restrictive options a chance, the Park Service has put Florida's reputation as 'Fishing Capital of the World' at stake."

CHEFS, ANGLERS RING THE BELL TO SAVE STRIPERS

In efforts to promote the "Save Our Stripers" campaign, a pledge to not serve wild striped bass in restaurants until the threat to the population subsides, chefs and founders of the campaign, with leaders of the Fishermen's Conservation Association, a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to promote the access, habitat and fisheries management, visited Nasdaq MarketSite in Times Square.

In honor of the occasion, a delegation that included Kerry Heffernan, executive chef of Grand Banks and co-founder of "Save Our Stripers," Mike Dean, co-founder of "Save Our Stripers," and Frank Crescitelli, co-founder of "Save Our Stripers" and president of the Fishermen's Conservation Association, rang the opening bell.



RINGING ENDORSEMENT: "Save Our Stripers" campaign leaders ring the opening bell at Nasdaq MarketSite.



WRONG CHOICE: This South Florida permit bit off more than it could chew.

EXPANDING LAST SUPPER

A game fish fabled for its maddening selectiveness paid the ultimate price for a poor choice of food.

South Florida anglers Rolando Medina and Julio Guevara left Black Point Marina one recent morning for a day of fishing on nearby patch reefs when they spotted something odd on the surface, in the middle of Biscayne Bay. Medina pulled his 16-foot Hewes Bonefisher alongside it and discovered it was a permit of about 15-pounds floating on its side. The fish appeared recently deceased, and Guevara retrieved it from the water for close examination. The reason behind the fish's demise became evident the instant the anglers looked in its mouth. Inside was a blowfish, still alive but stuck in the permit's gills. Clearly, the permit hadn't accounted for the blowfish expanding like a balloon and made a meal of it. Sad ending, but in the marine world, picking exotic foods over the usual diet can prove costly.

FISHERY COUNCILS FORM NEW COALITION

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in joint session in Key West recently to address shared issues.

The two councils have been developing management alternatives for yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper and black grouper, all species that occur in overlapping jurisdictions. The councils agreed to develop a joint amendment to delegate limited management authority (bag limits, size limits, seasons and trip limits) to the state of Florida.

In addition, the Gulf Council agreed to let the SAFMC manage the Florida/South Florida hogfish stocks and to consider a boundary line from "Shark Point" off Florida's southwestern coast as the stock boundary. The South Atlantic Council will develop measures to rebuild the stock through Amendment 37 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

The SAFMC also approved Amendment 35 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan for review by the secretary of Commerce, removing black snapper, mahogany snapper, dog snapper and schoolmaster snapper from the fishery-management unit, as well as clarifying regulations for commercial golden tilefish endorsements.

JULIO GUEVARA (TOP); COURTESY "SAVE OUR STRIPERS" (LEFT)

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SaltWater SPORTSMAN READER'S CATCH

LING KING

Capt. Daniel Prochak with Cutlass Crew Fishing Charters of Merritt Island, Florida, had a lucky day off Port Canaveral when this jumbo 32-pound cobia (aka ling) swam up to his boat.

COURTESY DANIEL PROCHAK

DROP US A LINE

Got a piece of good news to share? Want to gripe? Like to see your thoughts on the pages of *Salt Water Sportsman*? Send your letters, manuscripts and any relevant comments to editor@saltwatersportsman.com or via U.S. mail: SWS Editor, 460 N. Orlando Ave., Suite 200, Winter Park, FL 32789. Unsolicited manuscripts are welcomed but will not be acknowledged or returned unless accompanied by an SASE. We are not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts or photographs. **CUSTOMER SERVICE AND SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES:** saltwatersportsman.com/cs or 800-759-2127. Outside the United States: 800-979-6828; Back Issues: 800-464-2819; Bulk Reprints: 877-652-5295, ext. 117.

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SWS KIDS

LIZA HERRING, 14

Liza learned to fish in the surf at the age of 3. She now catches live bait with her cast net, carries her own rod and reel and tackle box, and aspires to be a marine biologist. While Liz has fought and released many 100-pound sharks and giant rays, this 42-pound cobia angled on a trout rod was her first catch from the family's new boat. She even had to grab a second gaff to pull it aboard.

Wilmington, North Carolina

MASON ERBS, 10

Mason Erbs (aka "Bobby Hill") is the youngest of three sons in a family born and raised on saltwater fishing in South Florida. An avid GoPro kid and straight-A student, Mason fishes regularly for his two favorite species — dolphin and snapper — off Knights Key and Bakers Haulover Inlet aboard the family boat, *Amazing Grace*. He recently caught this dolphin while trolling ballyhoo in 700 feet of water.

Southwest Ranches, Florida



WYATT SOWUL, 5 AND PARKER SOWUL, 9

Wyatt and Parker live in a big Northeastern fishing town and look forward to the photos of fish, lures and boats in each issue of *Salt Water Sportsman*. Since the age of 3, Parker has enjoyed fishing for fluke and striped bass on the family's Grady-White, and Wyatt likes fishing for bluefish in the Manasquan River. Both love casting topwater plugs in the evenings and experiencing the excitement of fighting fish with their dad, Brent.

Brielle, New Jersey



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VIDEO *Scan to see what it's like to hop in the boat and go fishing with Bill Dance*

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01. TROUT TRICKS

Z-Man Fishing Products adds **TroutTrick soft plastics** and **Trout Eye jig heads** to its growing line of high-tech inshore baits. Available in 14 color patterns, the new lures boast Z-Man's proprietary 10X Tough ElaZtech construction, and their elongated profile, slim tail and ribbed body combine to create action irresistible to spotted seatrout and a wide variety of saltwater species. For the perfect TroutTrick system, the soft plastics can be paired with Trout Eye jig heads, which are hand-poured using heavy-duty black-nickel Mustad UltraPoint hooks. They also feature oversize 3-D eyes for a realistic look and dual needle-sharp keeper spikes to securely hold Z-Man's ElaZtech and other plastics. **TroutTrick baits, $5.99/pack; Trout Eye jig heads, $4.99/pack; zmanfishing.com**

02. NEW SCOOP

The new **Scoop Anchor** from **West Marine** represents years of incremental improvements in scoop-style anchor design. Created and tested by the Manson team in New Zealand, the scoop anchor features sophisticated shapes and angles that combine with an improved holding-power-to-weight ratio that is tops in the West Marine anchor family. Constructed of high-strength alloy steel with a thick, hot-dipped galvanized finish, the anchor quickly sets and automatically resets with changing wind and current conditions in all bottom types, and it integrates with most existing tackle and bow rollers. Available from 21 to 30 5/16 inches for boats 9 to 50 feet in length. **$129-$369; westmarine.com**

03. WEATHER WATCH

Grundens USA debuts its **Gage Weather Watch** rainwear line in new Kryptek Highlander camouflage. Camo Weather Watch garments include jacket, trouser pants and bib, each engineered to be fully waterproof, breathable and lightweight. The camo pants and bibs feature taped seams, leg zippers and leg cuffs for a secure, watertight fit. An inside-zippered chest pocket and a cargo pocket on the right leg provide handy storage for gear and personal items. The jacket is built tough from durable nylon, and it offers double storm flaps, a drop-tail adjustable hem and a full-size hood with elastic drawstring closures, along with two roomy zippered pockets. Available in sizes XS to 5XL. **Jacket, $61; bib, $76; pants, $59; grundens.com**

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Under the most recent case, reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA), there is a requirement for NOAA Fisheries to report to Congress on the progress of stocks that are overfished and under rebuilding plans, as well as stocks listed as having overfishing occurring. For those not familiar with the terminology, overfished means the stock size is below a minimum level threshold and overfishing means that too many fish are being removed. Each term can happen independently or, in the worst case, together.

VITAL INPUT: Catch reports from anglers provide the data to manage fisheries.

GOOD NEWS AND MORE

REBUILT STOCKS AND NEW POLICY INDICATE PROGRESS.



BY RIP CUNNINGHAM

With the 2015 fishing season well past its midpoint, there are a few things happening that should put smiles on the faces of recreational anglers. Hopefully, for many or even most, the smiles reflect success out on the water. In spite of a couple of question marks, scientific advice indicates increased numbers of a lot of species that anglers like to catch.

Stocks Up

Earlier this year, NOAA Fisheries released its annual Status of the Stocks, and if you eliminate the New England area, the news looks fairly good. A couple of stocks, gag grouper and golden tilefish, have been rebuilt and taken off the overfished listing. Recreational anglers catch both. Six species were removed from the overfishing list, most of which are targeted by anglers.

Since 2007, this Status of the Stocks report has been issued eight times. When it first started, 24 percent of all managed stocks were on the overfished list and 17 percent were on the overfishing list. In 2014, 16 percent are on the overfished list and 8 percent are on the overfishing list. That's progress.

Build It

When stocks move to a rebuilt status and/or out of an overfishing status, we know this is good news for the recreational fishing industry. Past performance shows that abundance drives interest in fishing and dramatically increases the number of fishing trips by anglers. Surveys have shown that anglers go fishing for a variety of reasons, but I believe the primary one is to catch fish. When anglers can catch the fish they want, they are going to go. This is a major reason why fisheries managers have such a hard time trying to determine recreational catches for rebuilding stocks. It is why recreational fishermen see such a disconnect between rebuild-

EASY FORMULA
A simple equation yields reliable catch estimates.

EFFORT (Estimated number of angler trips) × **CATCH RATE** (Estimated number of fish caught per angler trip) = **TOTAL CATCH** (Estimated total number of fish caught)

NOAA FISHERIES

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ing stocks and decreasing bag limits, seasons and increasing size limits. There is an answer, but managers have not found it.

Keeping Count

There are some other actions that NOAA Fisheries is taking to enhance recreational fishing. First is the ongoing effort to get the new Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) up and running in its latest iteration. I have discussed this program in the past. It has taken far longer than anyone wanted or expected, and it still is not fully operational. MSA required that NOAA Fisheries create and implement this new program after MSA was reauthorized in 2006. This was after a National Research Council (NRC) report indicated that the old MRFSS data-collection system had some gaping holes in it. Well, here we are, eight years older and still no functional replacement. Work has been ongoing, and it was recently announced that NOAA Fisheries was again going to request an NRC review of the work that has been done to make MRIP fix the problems noted earlier. The NRC review will provide an objective, independent analysis of NOAA's response to the 2006 recommendations. It will also detail the progress in meeting the commitment to Congress and the recreational fishing community to address these issues through a process that is scientifically sound, statistically robust, collaborative and transparent.

OK, OK, I can't argue with any of that, but like many stakeholders, I'd like it done tomorrow. That data-collection system might be the solution to some of the recreational fisheries management problems. I've always believed robust and accurate data input is necessary to ensure the output is not garbage.

Welcome Policy

The National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy Implementation plan released earlier is another positive program. I discussed it in a previous column and indicated the next step would be the implementation of the policy. In the words of Eileen Sobeck, assistant administrator for NOAA Fisheries, "This implementation plan is not an endpoint for our work with the recreational community; it is an additional waypoint on the journey to continually improve stewardship. Through this implementation plan and other work, we look forward to continuing constructive dialogue and collaboration with the recreational fishing community."

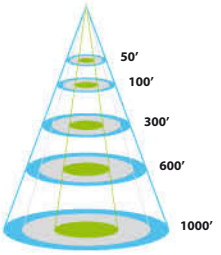
While none of this is rocket science or too flashy, it is attention being paid to the recreational fishing industry and stakeholders, and that is what we have wanted for many years. It reminds me of James Michael Curley, infamous mayor of Boston, who said, "I don't care what they say about me in the press, just make sure my name is spelled correctly." Well they are writing about recreational fisheries, and the spelling is correct. All good news!



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	Beam Diameter		
Depth	PM111LM/LH 15° Beamwidth	PM111LHW 25° Beamwidth	PM411LMW 40° Beamwidth
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100 ft	26 ft	44 ft	73 ft
300 ft	79 ft	130 ft	220 ft
600 ft	160 ft	270 ft	440 ft
1000 ft	260 ft	440 ft	730 ft



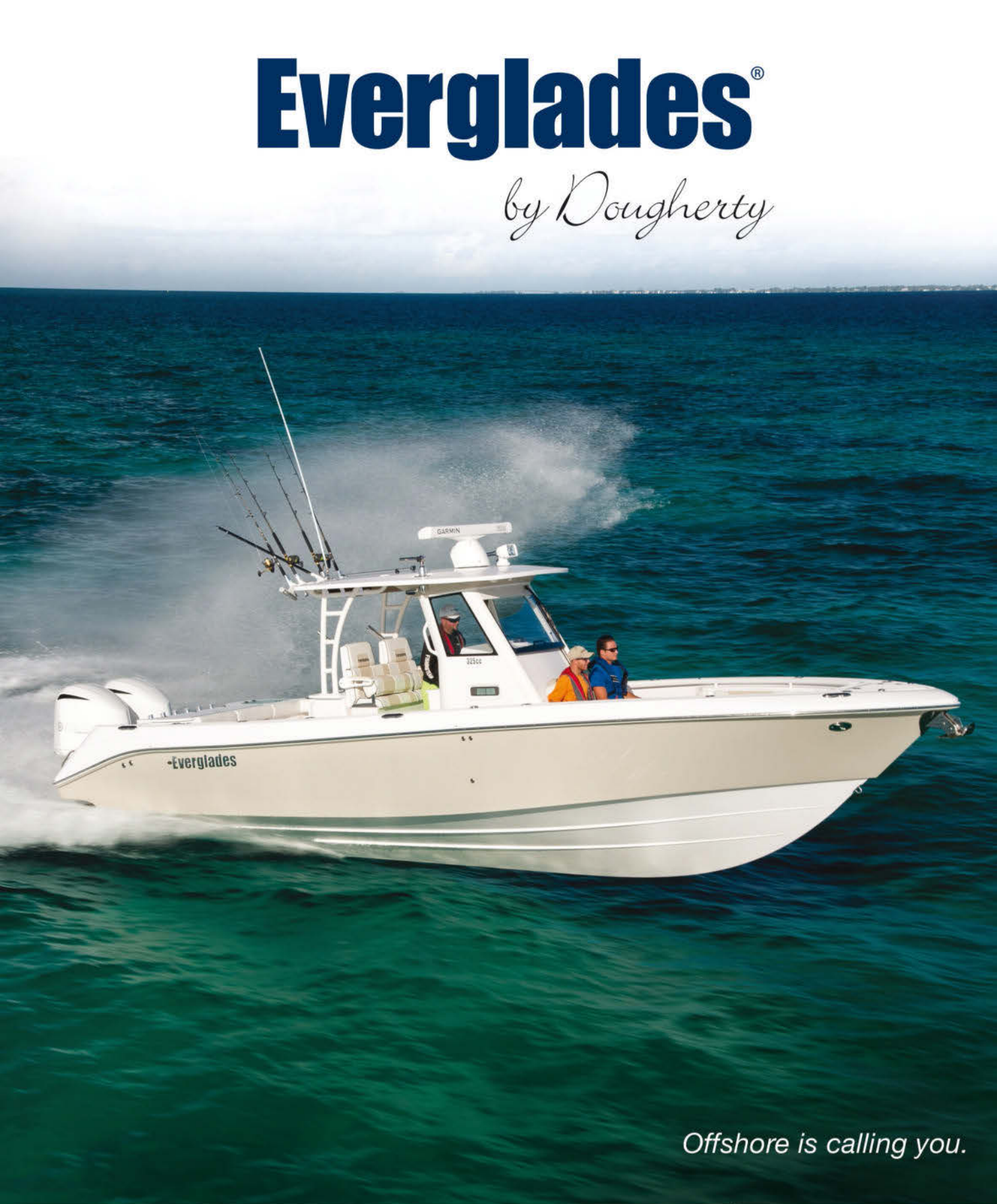


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JOHN BROWNLEE

INSIDE

04

STYLES OF OFFSHORE LURES AND WHERE TO PLACE THEM IN YOUR TROLLING SPREAD FOR BEST RESULTS.

PURPOSE BUILT: Variations in head design dictate lure action, and each has a function.

PRO LURE TIPS

A LURE-FISHING EXPERT EXPLAINS HOW TO CREATE AN EFFECTIVE SPREAD.

It is widely known that artificial trolling lures are great for catching marlin, but not everyone knows they also work well for wahoo, dolphin and tunas. Every skipper has a favorite lure color and style, and different areas often require different tactics. But no matter where you fish and what species you intend to target, you must learn not only what types of lures to pull, but also where to place them in the pattern in order to succeed.

JESSICA HAYDAHL RICHARDSON

09/2015 / VOL.76/ NO 08

IDEAL SPREAD

Varying designs make lures better suited for different purposes and conditions. For a trolling spread to be most productive, it requires the right lure choices and their proper placement. This proven performer eliminates the guesswork.

1. BIG TEASE: Oversize teasers work best in rough water, close to the transom, where they're most attractive.

2. SPLASHY: Concave head lures create havoc at the surface in most sea conditions. They're ideal for short flat lines.

3. SLANTED: A slant-head lure works well short, but it might need to be fished back a little when it's rough.

4. VERSATILE: Flat heads shine in a variety of conditions and are a top choice to fish off the outrigger, on the fourth wave.

5. FOLLOW UP: Multipurpose flat heads are also a good option for the fifth wave and deployment off the long rigger.

6. LAST SHOT: A jet head far back off a center rigger lures billfish fading from the spread and often hooks wahoo or tuna.

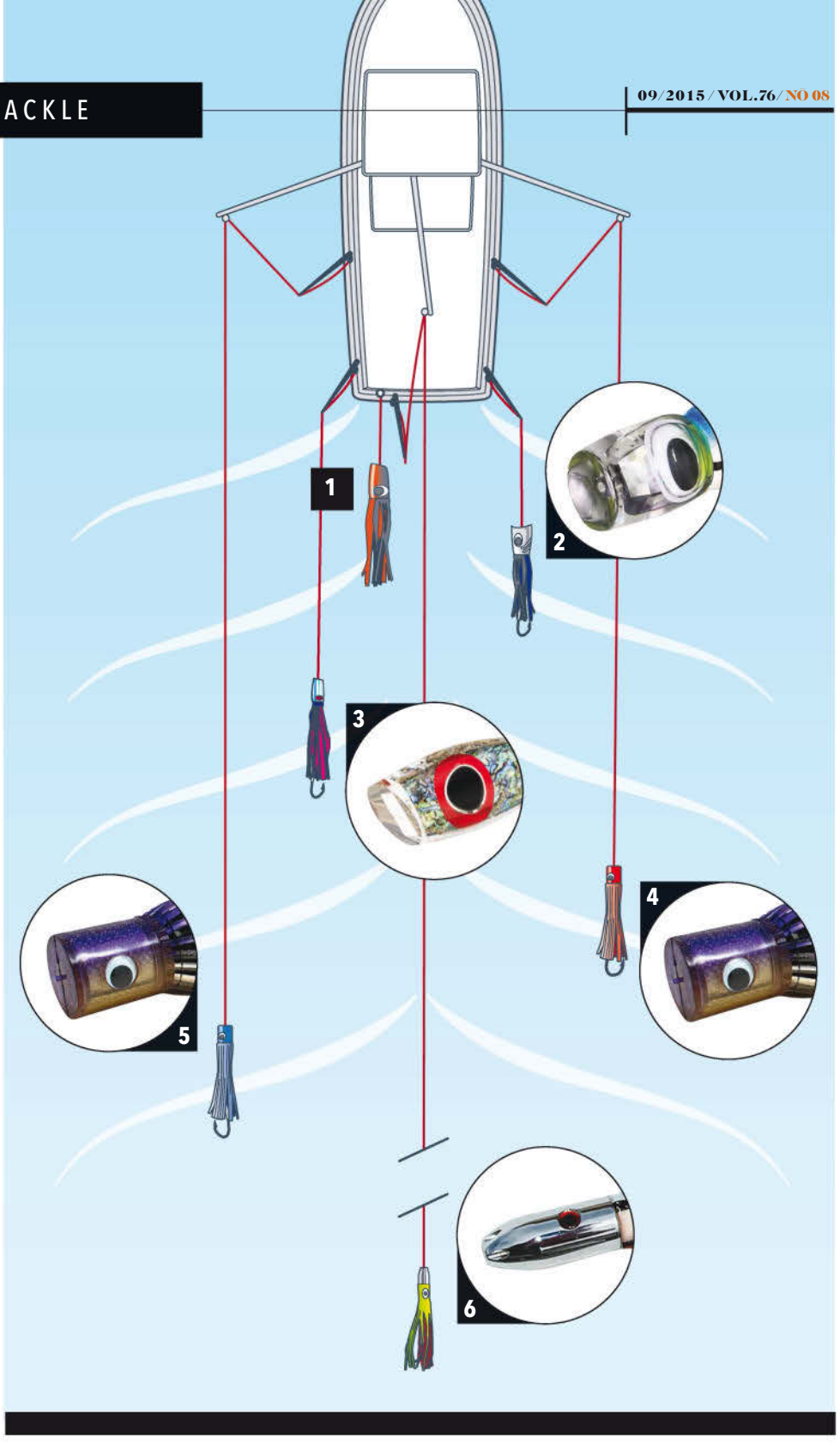


ILLUSTRATION BY TIM BARKER

Capt. Frank "Skip" Smith needs no introduction to serious offshore anglers. As captain of the famous *Hooker and Madam* mothership operation, between 1979 and 1990, he and his crew led owners Jerry and Deborah Dunaway to 37 IGFA world records — most of them billfish. Smith remains one of the world's leading experts when it comes to trolling lures, and he recently shared some pointers about setting an effective spread that produces consistently, not just an occasional bite.

"The most important things to me are color, balance, hooks, leader and speed," he says. "Given that these lures are being towed at 7.5 to 9 knots, four basic designs work best: concave heads, slanted heads, flat heads and jets."

Many captains new to lure fishing struggle with where to put each type of lure in the spread. "Slant heads work great in calm water," Smith explains. "Most boats in Hawaii and other calm water areas like to run these as one of their short baits. But when fishing in rough areas, these lures will jump because of the slanted head and the balance of the lure."

Lures with concave heads also work well when pulled



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JOHN BROWNLEE

EXPERT TIP

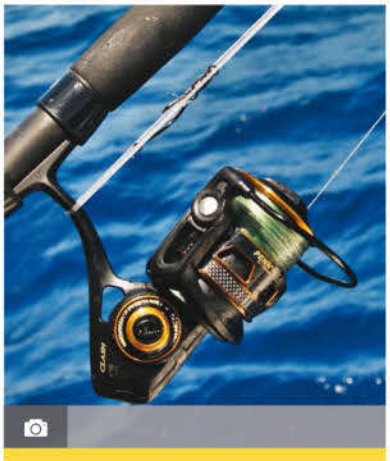
LEADERS SECURE AND READY FOR ACTION



GEORGE POVEROMO, *SWS* contributing editor, has shared his angling techniques for over 30 years.

For mutton snapper, very long leaders are vital to success. They enable live bait to swim virtually unrestricted, which usually prompts a full take when mutton peck at the bait and feel no resistance from the weight. I often use a 30-foot leader joined to the fishing line with a small barrel swivel, and I affix the sinker with 12 to 15 inches of light monofilament to the eye of another swivel that slides freely on the fishing line.

When storing rods with those long leaders, just cut off the sinker and reel the main swivel to within a foot from the rod tip. Then, under pressure, pull downward on the leader and wrap it around the reel seat and up and around the second or third guide below the rod tip. Once you've wrapped the entire length of the leader, latch the hook to the foot of the nearest guide. If the rod is called back into service, all you need to do is unwrap the leader, tie on another sinker, and you're back in the game.



MANAGEMENT SYSTEM: Extra-long leaders remain organized and ready to deploy when wrapped around the reel seat and the second or third line guide from the tip.



CALL 'EM IN: This concave-head lure creates maximum disturbance, even in rough water.

close to the boat. "Most concave lures are better balanced and consistently create havoc at the surface in most sea conditions," Smith adds. "You can always run this type of lure on a short flat line and the marlin will find it."

The veteran game boat captain says most pros put their biggest lures closest to the boat, the smaller lures on the long riggers, and they also pull large teasers close to the boat.

For the long outrigger lures, it's hard to beat a flat head. "Mold Craft's Softhead Wide Range is the most common, well-balanced lure you can put out there. It stays in the water and looks great no matter where you put it," Smith says. "There are many other lures on the market with that long flat head, and they are the best ones to have in rough sea conditions."

Jet-head lures also get the nod. "Jets are one of the most underestimated lures you can use," Smith claims. "Put a small one out at all times on your longest or center rigger. If the marlin do not find it, you will catch wahoo or a tuna for dinner. The smaller jets will find that white marlin or a sailfish, too."

There's one lure type that Smith doesn't care for much: the swimmer. "Most pros do not use this lure because it moves a lot, and the hookup ratio is not very good," Smith explains.

Offshore fishermen love to debate lure color, and Smith is no exception. "I like to start with four different colors and give the fish their choice," he says. "Once I get a bite on one, I may double up on that color, but some pros like to use all the same color so they imitate a school of bait fish behind their boat."

Leader size and material matter, too. With higher speeds, you can get away with really heavy leader; at slower speeds, that leader hangs in the water in front of the lure, and the fish tend to fade off because it just doesn't look right. "Go as light as you can, and use fluorocarbon, if possible," Smith says. "It is tougher than any other leader of the same pound-test."

Another common debate centers on the appropriate set of hooks: one hook or two? "Most pros have gone to single hooks set way toward the back of the skirt," says Smith. "The saying is that when using two hooks, one is for the fish and the other is to get in your hand. When you release the fish, it's better to leave them with only one pierced lip."

Position the lures on the faces of the waves in the boat's wake, with the jet head pulled way down the middle. By mastering a basic spread and fine-tuning it to fit your style and your area, you are certain to raise more billfish to your lures.

To read about Capt. Skip Smith's angling adventures aboard *Madam and Hooker*, pick up a copy of his newly released book, *Tales of a Hooker and Her Madam*, available through amazon.com.

RICHARD GIBSON (TOP); GEORGE POVEROMO

THE NEXT LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE TREATMENTS HAS FINALLY EMERGED.



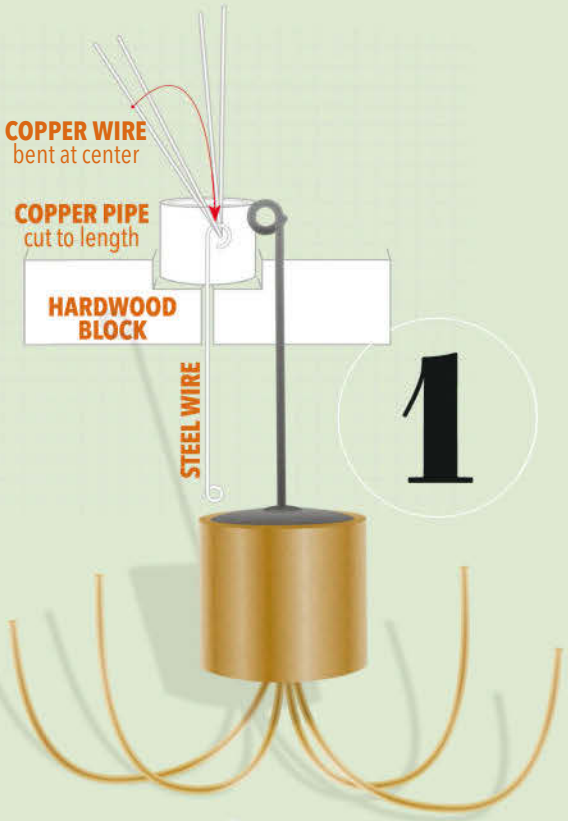
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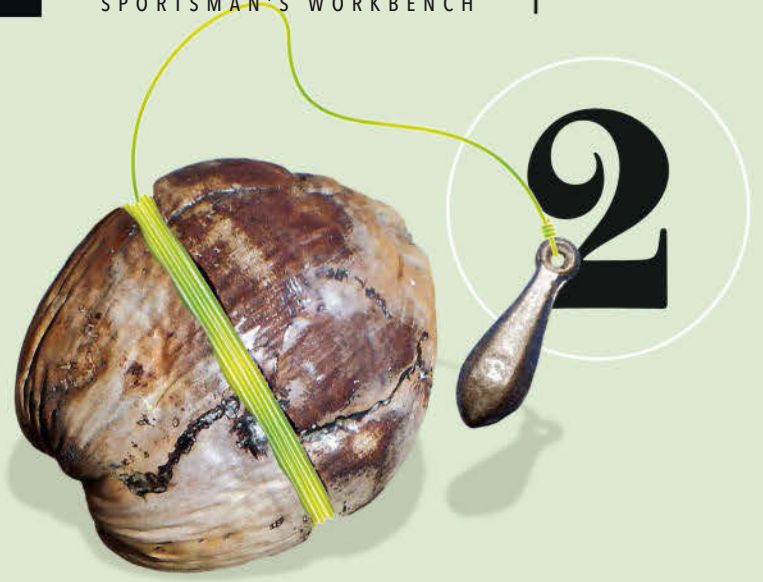
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1

SINKERS FROM SCRAP

I make sinkers for surf-fishing by cutting ¾-inch copper tubing to desired length and fitting it into a ½-inch deep groove in a wooden block with a ⅛-inch hole through the center. I bend two strands of No. 12 copper wire for the legs and hook them at the center with a coat hanger pulled through the block to hold them in place. Then I pour molten lead into the tubing, remove it from the block after it cools, and I bend a line-tie loop at the end of the coat hanger. Finally, I bend the copper wire legs like a grapnel. If the weight hangs on the bottom, a steady pull straightens the legs.

Anthony Caravella
Crescent City, Florida

2

SECRET MARKER

If I find a hot spot while drifting over a wreck, ledge or hard bottom in a high-traffic area, I want to mark the spot without giving away its location to other fishermen or guides. So instead of using a white or colored float, I carry a dry coconut with a shallow groove cut around it and a length of 30-pound mono with a heavy sinker on the end. When I want to mark a spot, I throw the coconut in the water and use it to align my drift. Passing boats take no notice of the makeshift buoy, and even if I forget to retrieve it, nobody investigates a floating coconut.

James Shafer
Islamorada, Florida

3

TANGLE-FREE RIG

To build a tangle-free sinker slide for a fish-finder rig, I cut a 6-inch piece of polyethylene plumbers tubing to a point and push it into a No. 1 black barrel swivel as far as it'll go. Next, I clamp the pointed end of the tube in a vise, hold the other end with pliers and stretch the polyethylene using a heat gun until the swivel slides easily onto the tubing. As the tubing cools, it swells and holds the swivel in place. Then I just cut the tubing to desired length, attach a Duo-Lock snap, and I have a tangle-free fish finder. Polyethylene is not braid-friendly, so I use a mono leader when I'm fishing braided line.

Joe Ivan
Perth Amboy, New Jersey

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DOLPHIN ON THE FLY

THIS POPULAR SPECIES REMAINS THE MOST ACCESSIBLE OF BLUE-WATER GAME FISH FOR FLY-FISHERMEN.

BY CARTER ANDREWS



CARTER ANDREWS, TV host of *The Obsession of Carter Andrews,* speaks from decades of experience pursuing saltwater game fish around the world.

Dolphin might not be the biggest or baddest fish that swim, but their willingness to eat a fly and their spectacular acrobatics make them one of the greatest fish on fly. For saltwater fly anglers looking to move beyond the flats, it's a fantastic fish to start with.

As with any migratory fish, there are better times of the year than others to target them. Spring and summer in the Florida Keys is an excellent time. Dolphin prefer clean water, so start on the edge and work your way offshore. They love structure, which typically holds bait. Structure can be bottom contours, current lines or, best of all, floating debris. There is nothing better than a weed line. The last piece of the puzzle is a frigate bird. When you find a frigate working open water or a weed line, more often than not, he is on fish — and most of the time, it will be dolphin.

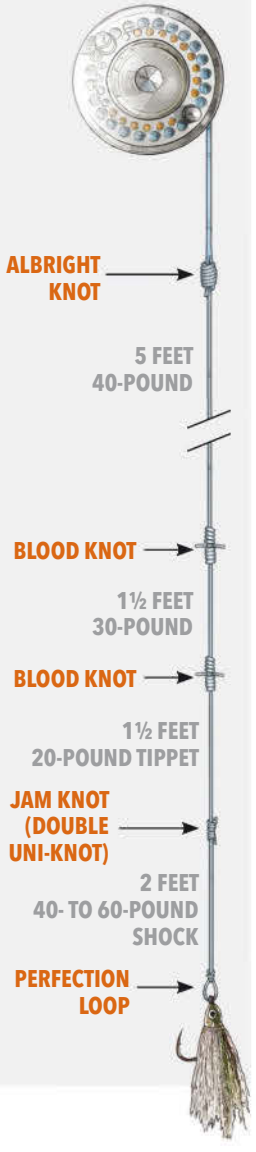
Gear Up

Before I leave the dock, I load up some spinning rods armed with topwater poppers with the hooks removed to tease in the fish, either casting or trolling. Another good choice for trolling is ballyhoo rigged hookless. And, if possible, take live bait for chumming. Pilchards are best, but almost any small, fast-swimming baitfish will work. If you don't have that option, dead chum helps keep fish around the boat when you find them.

Once you find a weed line, scattered grass or other floating debris, it's time to get to work. You can drive around hunting for fish or take a proactive role and search with your teasers. Whether you cast the hookless poppers or troll hookless baits, you are covering water and increasing your odds of finding fish. I like to concentrate on the heaviest areas of grass or debris.

PREFERRED SETUP

To deal with the wind and the chance of a big dolphin, my fly rod of choice is a 10-weight NRX by G.Loomis paired with a Hatch 9 Plus reel and a floating line. I fish a 20-pound leader with 40- or 60-pound shock tippet.



TED LUND (TOP); ILLUSTRATION BY JOE MAHLER / JOEMAHLER.COM


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If I'm on a weed or current line, I parallel it.

Get Ready

I keep my fly line stripped off the reel, coiled on the deck or in a bucket. If I'm trolling, I go to the back right corner because I am right-handed. If we are in the bow and casting poppers to tease dolphin in, I manage my line on the deck as I wait for my shot. Many times you find dolphin and don't have to worry about teasing them in: Their curiosity often brings them right to the boat. Once they show up, feeding them chum keeps them engaged and allows you multiple opportunities to hook fish. If they start to lose interest, I work the popper around and get them fired up again.

Fire Away

The placement of the fly is important when teasing them with the popper. If you cast behind the popper, chances are the fish won't see the fly because they are focused on the popper. Instead, cast in front of the popper and bring the popper toward the fly. Getting them to eat is not difficult. Just make a good presentation and strip aggressively.

I carry a variety of subsurface baitfish patterns, weighted and unweighted, and a number of poppers. Besides natural colors, dolphin are also suckers for green-and-yellow or pink-and-white flies. Generally, all you need is an 8- to 10-weight outfit with a floating line. I rarely use anything else. So hook 'em up and let the show begin. Watching a colorful dolphin running and jumping just never gets old for me.

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DEDICATED: Readouts display a variety of data, but assign one per engine for best monitoring. The fourth gauge in this quad setup shows data for all engines at once.

SLOW BURN

BOOST YOUR BOAT'S RANGE TO MAXIMIZE YOUR FISHING.



BY CAPT. DAVE LEAR

When you have your sights set on far fishing horizons, your first concern is getting there and back while maintaining a critical safety reserve of fuel in your tank.

You can stretch your trips in various ways, and the primary for outboard boats is maximizing fuel consumption efficiency. Your outboard's digital smart gauge can be a valuable tool if you use it correctly.

"The digital display system is an interface that talks directly to the engine-control module to provide real-time accurate data," says David Greenwood, Suzuki Marine's product planning manager. Suzuki calls theirs the Suzuki Modular Instrument System, but other outboard manufacturers have similar setups. All of these systems monitor and display outboard-engine functions. SMIS gauges are required for Suzuki digital throttle and shift engines; older engines with control cables can also be upgraded.

A lot of factors determine optimum fuel economy," Greenwood explains. "Cruising speed, trim angle, hull drag and the throttle setting all come into play. The engine has sensors that monitor temperature and pressure, as well as a throttle-position sensor that monitors the throttle opening or angle to tell how much fuel to inject. By setting the gauge to display fuel economy and miles per gallon, you can dial everything in for the best performance."

Each engine has its own interface within the network. Greenwood recommends having an independent gauge for each outboard.

"It's much more user-friendly to have one per engine," he says. "That's a lot of potential information to read. If you pile all the engine data on one gauge, you'll forever be punching buttons to find the data you want."

Here is how to use

VERSATILE

All manufacturers provide multi-data display options for fuel-monitoring systems.







RICK HAUSER (TOP); DAVE LEAR (3)

The Sea is Calling...







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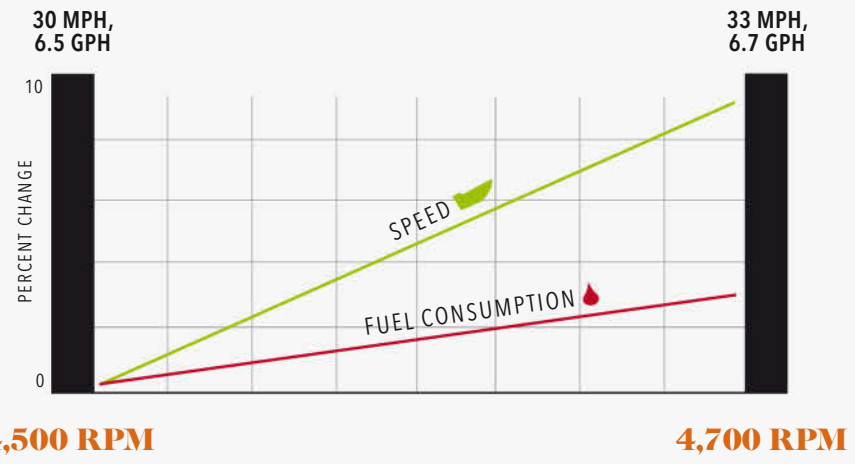
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FAIR TRADE-OFF: In this example, between 4,500 rpm and 4,700 rpm, speed increases by 9.09 percent while fuel consumption increases by only 2.98.

that data to your advantage. Say you're cruising at 4,500 rpm doing 30 mph and the display shows a fuel burn of 6.5 gph. By bumping the throttle up to 4,700 rpm, you pick up 3 mph with a 0.2 gph increase in fuel consumption. So you're going faster and covering more distance without burning much more gas. Those exact readings from the gauges let you set your engines for optimum performance. And it's applicable from single- up to quad-engine setups.

That same available information is useful at slower speeds as well. On most outboard hulls, when the engines are turning 2,500 to 3,000 rpm, it's usually right at the breaking point of planing versus plowing. By monitoring the gauges and bumping the throttle up by as little as 100 to 200 rpm, the hull breaks loose from the water and fuel economy improves.

Taking extra fuel — gasoline or diesel — is another way to extend your boat's range when venturing offshore while still maintaining a safety reserve. It's a common practice for anglers running to the canyons from Mid-Atlantic ports, heading to oil and gas rigs throughout the Gulf of Mexico, or transiting from Southern California down to remote waters off the Baja peninsula. But to carry fuel safely with the least amount of hassles, you need an auxiliary fuel bladder. Aero Tec Laboratories (atlinc.com) is a popular manufacturer of two collapsible tank styles made from hardy rubberized fabric. Capacities range from 25 to 500 gallons, with prices starting around $500. Custom sizes are also available.

"The Petro-Flex pillow style was our original product, and we introduced the FueLocker five years ago," says Jeff Heotzler, ATL's director of marketing. "The FueLocker design is a mattress style, so it fills vertically and saves deck space."

Boats using auxiliary fuel bladders fill them before heading offshore and stow them temporarily in the cockpit or lashed on the bow deck. Once the boat's fuel tanks are emptied enough to accommodate the extra fuel, the auxiliary bladder capacity is transferred to the main tanks by hose via gravity feed, siphoning or a pump. A ½-inch spill-resistant standpipe is standard, but the 1-inch upgrade allows a flow rate three times faster, according to Heotzler. The bladder's flexible material collapses as it empties, so it can be rolled up and stowed out of the way.



EXTRA RANGE: For extending range on long runs, spare fuel rides in collapsible bladders safely nestled inside the cockpit.

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RELEASE 208RX

The Release 208RX from Release Boats shapes up as a solid performer with hand-laid fiberglass composite construction, foam-filled box-beam stringer grid and all stainless or bronze through-hulls. With a draft of only 12 inches, anglers aboard this center console can target game fish in shallow bays as well as in open nearshore waters. The boat comes ready to fish, boasting a long list of standard equipment that includes a T-top with canvas canopy and spreader light, leaning post with cooler storage, bow cushions, cockpit bolsters, Porta Potti, aft bench seating for three with individual folding backrests, compass, hydraulic steering and more.
releaseboats.com

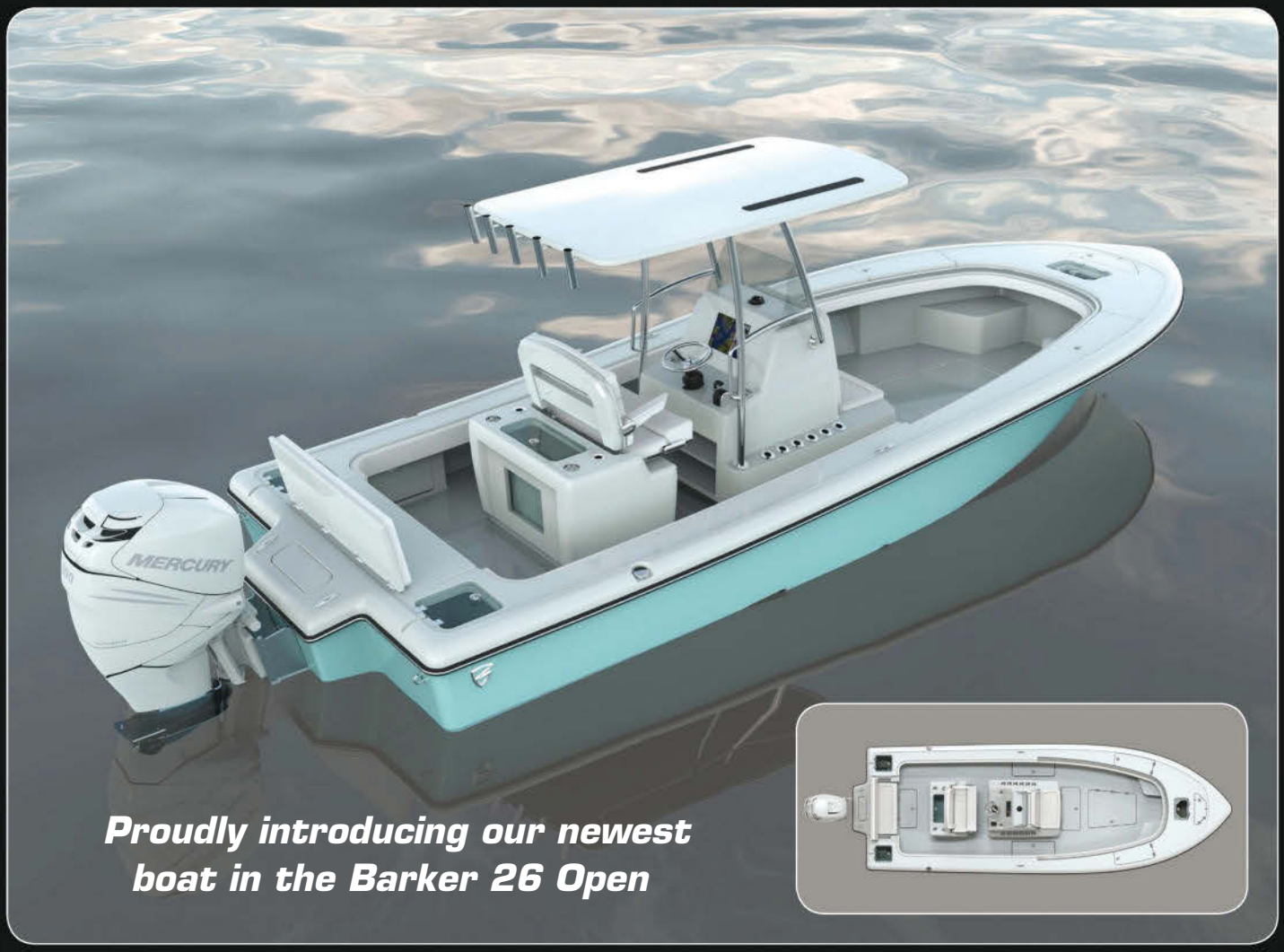


LENGTH: 20'8" | **BEAM:** 8'6" | **DRAFT:** 12"
WEIGHT: 2,500 LB. | **FUEL:** 68 GAL. | **MAX HP:** 200
PRICE: $39,995 well-equipped w/ Yamaha F150 and trailer



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LENGTH: 23'9" | **BEAM:** 8'5" | **DRAFT:** 14"
WEIGHT: 3,165 LB. | **FUEL:** 100 GAL. | **MAX HP:** 300
PRICE: $40,769 (w/ out power)

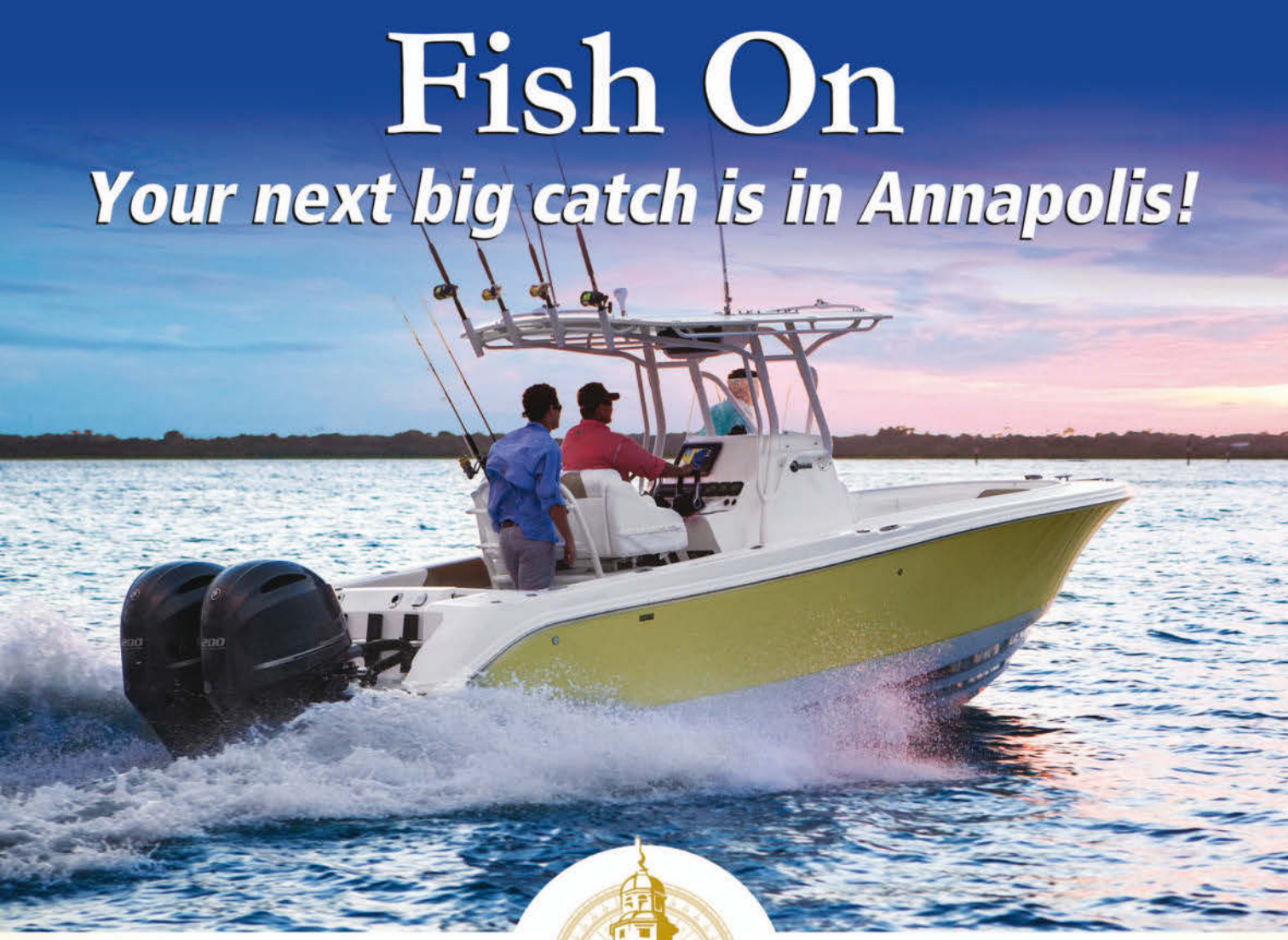
SEA CHASER 24 HCF SE

Carolina Skiff's new Sea Chaser 24 HCF SE is a hybrid fishing/cruising boat with something to offer every member of the family. The boat's step-hull design increases efficiency and improves performance, while numerous standard features serve both angling needs and creature comforts. There's a side entry door, a 25-gallon recirculating livewell, six flush-mount rod holders on the gunwales, a leaning post with backrest and fold-down footrest, rear bench seat with insulated cooler, quick-disconnect windscreen, Infinity AM/FM stereo with Bluetooth, USB/auxiliary plug and four waterproof speakers, compass, LED lighting in all compartments, high-pressure raw-water washdown and a fold-down boarding ladder. Substantial storage space includes a 208-quart U-shaped compartment and 32-gallon fish box up front, a 100-quart removable cooler and a 52-quart compartment in the rear. **carolinaskiff.com**



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FISHING BUDDY: An autopilot system relieves the skipper of the tedium of steering the boat and allows him to focus more attention on finding fish.

TURN FOR THE BETTER

AUTOPILOT FEATURES HELP YOU CATCH MORE FISH.



BY JIM HENDRICKS

We were 50 miles offshore and fishless after six hours of trolling when I discovered a 2-degree temperature break within a span of 75 yards, extending for a mile or more. Hoping to find fish on one side or the other, I engaged the autopilot and used the zigzag feature to troll back and forth across the temperature break.

Within a few minutes, we had a double hookup on yellowfin tuna. After landing those fish, I used the figure-eight feature to troll across the waypoint where we hooked the fish. That trick worked, too, as we continued catch yellowfin in the area for another hour.

These are just two examples of the angling advantages offered by autopilot systems from companies like Furuno, Garmin, Lowrance, Raymarine and Simrad.

While not a license to fall sleep at the helm, autopilot is a great navigational tool that frees skippers of the tedium of constantly manning the wheel. Autopilot also proves valuable when navigating in limited visibility conditions, such as fog or dark of night. The electronic pilot steers a course straighter than I could even hope to maintain, which allows me to focus more attention on the radar with the idea of avoiding approaching hazards my eyes can't detect.

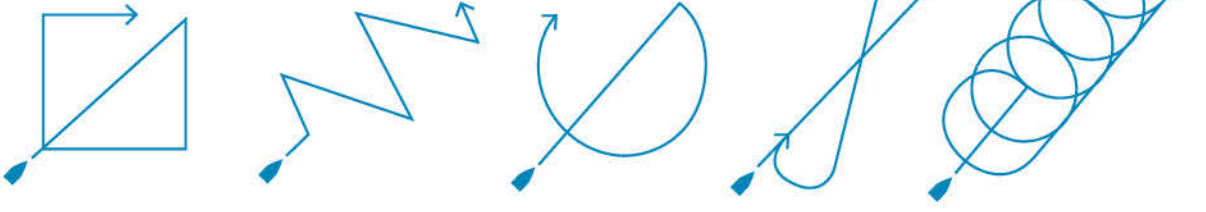
But whether trolling a rip for striped bass, downrigger fishing for king mackerel, slow-trolling for sailfish or high-speed trolling for wahoo, autopilots also make outstanding fishing tools. When networked with a GPS/chart plotter, a 'pilot assists with helm duties, improves fuel efficiency and allows you to focus on catching fish.

Extra Hands

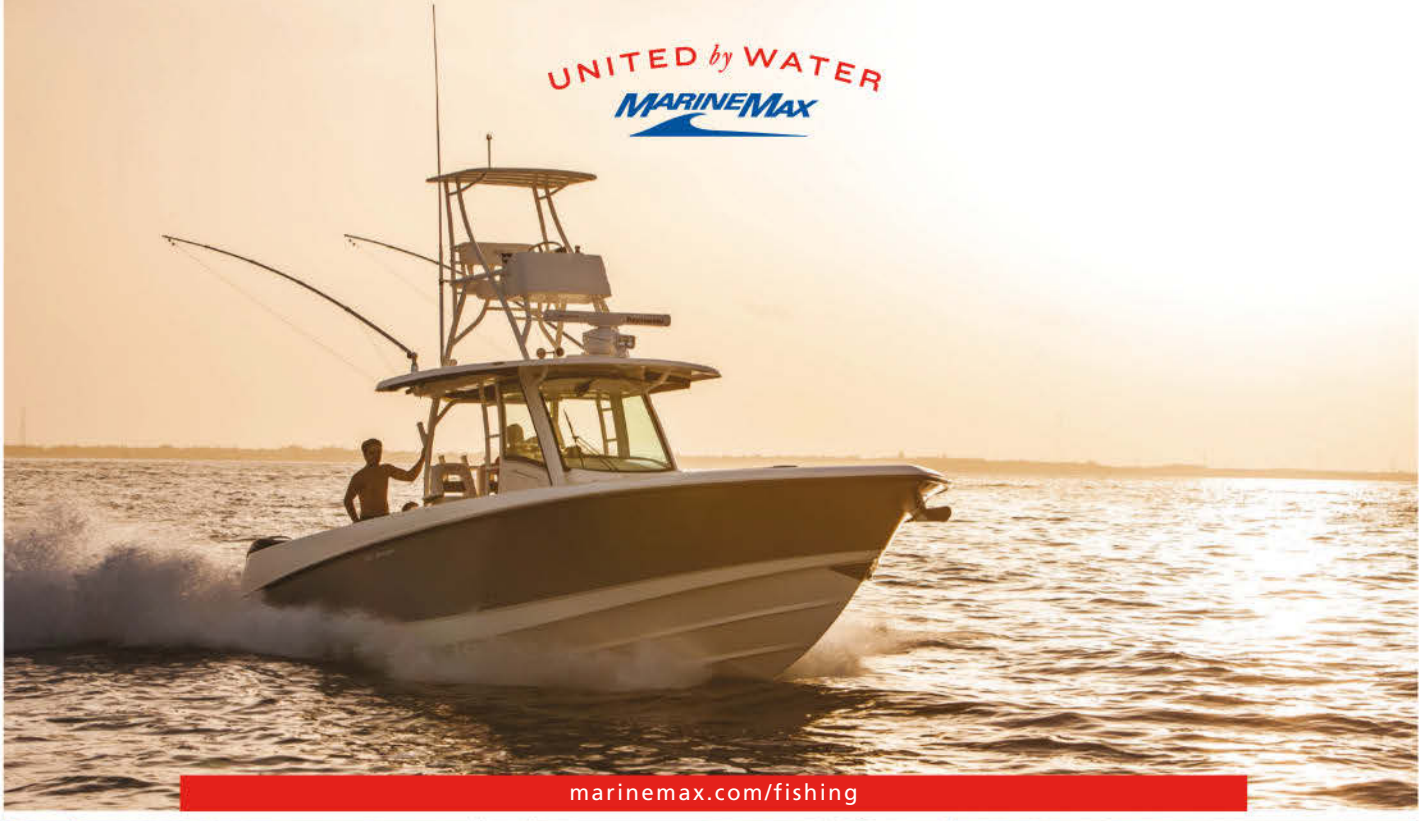
"An autopilot can definitely be an angler's best friend," says Jim McGowan, marketing manager for Raymarine.

PICK YOUR PATTERN

Sophisticated autopilot systems offer a range of preprogrammed trolling patterns, such as a square, zigzag, circle, figure-eight or spiral.



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CONTROL CHOICES

With many autopilot systems, you don't need the traditional control pad/display. You access the system through a networked multifunction touch-screen display. In fact, the Lowrance Outboard Pilot has no control pad. Everything runs through the display and a wireless remote. Many captains, however, feel more comfortable with a dedicated 'pilot control pad at the helm as a safeguard against a malfunctioning MFD.



SIMPLE INSTALLATION

Though increasingly sophisticated, marine autopilots are also simpler than ever to install, for two reasons. For one, GPS and electronic compass inputs have replaced the rudder feedback sensor, a relatively delicate mechanism that was a constant source of problems in older systems. Secondly, simple plug-and-play cables have supplanted old-school wire-and-crimp connectors.

"It frees his hands for other duties — as long as someone is watching where the boat is going."

For example, a captain who needs to rig and set trolling lines sets a course with the autopilot; then while motoring ahead at low speed, the captain steps into the cockpit and gets to work. The same holds true if you hook a fish and you need to keep the boat moving.

On most boats, it's easy to glance ahead from time to time for any hazards, such as other boats or a nearby shoreline, while tending lines.

Remote Possibility

Let's say you do spot a hazard or perhaps a diving frigate bird and want to make a course correction while away from the helm. A wireless remote, offered by all of the major autopilot brands, lets you do so from anywhere on the boat.

ZIGZAG: Furuno's NAVpilot-711C lets you run a zigzag pattern at an adjustable distance between turns.

"I carry the remote with me while on deck," says Seattle-based Capt. Mark Coleman of All Rivers & Saltwater Charters, who uses Raymarine Evolution ev-200 autopilots in his fleet of 31-foot Albin and 29-foot Defiance boats to troll for salmon and albacore.

"With an outside display, I make all the adjustments that I need without leaving the cockpit," he says.

An autopilot remote also comes in handy on boats that have towers but no second-station controls, allowing you to steer the boat from aloft. However, you still need someone at the helm to control the throttle and shift.

Pattern Maker

One of the greatest advancements in autopilot technology, the ability to steer the boat in preprogrammed patterns, provides a huge benefit while trolling. Furuno's NAVpilot-711C system, for example, offers the FishHunter mode that performs figure-eight, orbit, spiral, square and zigzag patterns relative to a point you specify.

Let's say you spot a flock of birds diving on bait. You can set the 'pilot to troll a wide circle around the action while you descend to the cockpit to toss some chum to attract fish into the trolling pattern. You can also mark the spot as a waypoint, then use a pattern such as the figure-eight set at a quarter-mile to work back through the area

Current Affair

One of the latest autopilot developments is a feature on Furuno's NAVpilot-711C called Sabiki mode, which works only on vessels with outboard engines. Designed for jigging for bait or bottomfishing, Sabiki mode compensates for current or wind to maintain a consistent heading astern.

Effective only with drift speeds of 5 mph or less, Sabiki mode also helps keep the boat in one place. When wind and current are running in the same direction over a wreck, for example, engage Sabiki mode over the spot, then use proportionate reverse throttle to hold position and keep anglers in the strike zone longer without having to jockey the wheel.

With fishing features like this, today's marine autopilots are certainly making a turn for the better.

ADVANCED AUTOPILOTS

Here are four top-of-the-line autopilot systems available today.



GARMIN GHP-20 $4,049.99



FURUNO NAVPILOT-711C $3,370



RAYMARINE EVOLUTION EV-200 $2,899.99



SIMRAD AP2403 VRF $2,499.99


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1

MAP TO SUCCESS

C-Map's new MAX-N+ 2015 charts for Lowrance HDS displays High-Resolution Bathymetric (HRB) bottom-contour data, exclusive Sport Fishing Data with information on wrecks and reefs, and Dynamic Tides & Currents to take advantage of the best tides. MAX-N+ 2015 charts also show the latest boundaries and details for California's network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Lowrance HDS Gen2, Gen2 Touch and Gen3 units require a free software upgrade (at lowrance.com) to run the new charts. Starting at $199; **c-map.jeppesen.com**



2

FISHING REMOTE

Control your Onix Series display from anywhere on the boat with the new Humminbird Bluetooth remote. The compact, wireless remote lets you set waypoints, adjust zoom, set sonar sensitivity, call up custom views and more. You can also customize the remote's capabilities; for instance, you can enable it to deploy a 360 Imaging transducer or activate an i-Pilot Link Spot-Lock function. The remote comes standard with a wireless dongle that plugs into the back of a Humminbird Onix display to receive the Bluetooth signal. $119.99; **humminbird.com**



3

TUNING IN

Lots of saltwater anglers enjoy music while fishing, and a new app lets you pick music, adjust sound levels and select speaker zones on select Fusion Electronics marine stereo systems using a Bluetooth-enabled iPhone or iPad. The Fusion-Link Remote Control app offers control from anywhere on your boat for Fusion's MS-UD650, MS-AV650, MS-UD750 and MS-AV750 systems. The downloadable app is available at no charge on the Apple Store. An Android version of the app is in development and will be available shortly. Free; **fusionentertainment.com**

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MY BOAT



BRUCE BURNETTE
MIAMI

I'm based out of Miami, and I use my 2006 Panga Marine Marquesas for charters as well as personal fishing. We have caught nearly every species on it, from inshore to offshore. A white marlin was the last species to hit the rail. The boat is 23 feet and very seaworthy. We've operated in 4- to 6-foot seas comfortably without getting soaked. Powered by a Suzuki 140 hp four-stroke, it is truly fuel efficient. It holds a 36-gallon fuel cell, which gives me an estimated range of 200 miles, but I usually run all day on just 10 to 15 gallons. I have the boat rigged with a tower and a second helm station with full controls and remote VHF mic. There's also a Garmin chart plotter, Standard Horizon VHF and a fully loaded Audiopipe Bluetooth sound system. I had a dual-livewell system installed with a 50-gallon well in front of the tower so I can have a rigged rod dropping directly into the livewell from up top. I also added a retractable canopy to provide shade in the front.



SHOW OFF YOUR BOAT!

From initial setup to modifications, show us how you've customized your boat to make it your ideal fishing machine. Send a short description and a hi-res image to: **yourboat@saltwatersportsman.com**. If we choose your boat, we'll send you a Star brite boat care kit: five products, a wash mitt and a bucket to keep your boat in top shape.



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09/2015 / VOL.76/ NO 08





BLUE-WATER CHAMP///

Known as dolphin on the East Coast, mahimahi in the Pacific and dorado in the Spanish-speaking world, this spectacular fighter is abundant worldwide, prolific and top fare on the table. Whether it's the targeted species or an incidental catch to other pursuits, dolphin remain a perennial favorite among offshore anglers.

/// PHOTO BY JESSICA HAYDAHL RICHARDSON

FIND THE HOT BITE THIS MONTH
IN THE TRAVELING FISHERMAN PAGE 88

by Mike Holliday

SUMMER SA



GARY CAPUTI

SWS PLANNER:

WHAT: Florida sailfish

WHEN: Summer months

WHERE: Miami to Sebastian Inlet

WHO: DIY anglers with boats suitable for the sea conditions. The following charter captains know how to procure the bait and target sailfish:

CAPT. BUTCH CONSTABLE
561-758-6267

CAPT. SCOTT FAWCETT
772-285-1055
offthechainfishing.com

CAPT. DICK DICKINSON
561-743-4516
jupiterfishing.com



IN SOUTH FLORIDA, SUMMER IS NO LONGER OFF-SEASON.

SAILFISH SUMMER

YOU RARELY HEAR ABOUT ANGLERS SPECIFICALLY TARGETING SAILFISH IN THE HEAT OF SUMMER. AFTER ALL, THE CRUX OF FLORIDA'S SPINDLEBEAK ACTION TAKES PLACE IN WINTER AND SPRING. BUT OVER THE LAST EIGHT TO 10 YEARS, REPORTS OF IMPRESSIVE SAILFISH CATCHES HAVE AN INCREASING NUMBER OF ANGLERS LEAVING THE DOCKS WITH SAILFISH ON THEIR MINDS, LONG AFTER BLUSTERY WINDS AND CHILLY TEMPERATURES HAVE GIVEN WAY TO LIGHT BREEZES AND SWELTERING WEATHER.

BY MIKE HOLLIDAY

FAST FACTS FOR SUCCESS

1. Use the baitfish species most prevalent in the area. Once you've loaded the livewell, you can either slow-troll, drift and kite-fish or drift and live-chum.
2. Drift temperature breaks with several baits suspended on top from kites and others at staggered depths using twist-on rubber-core sinkers above the leader.
3. Summer sailfish regularly travel in small pods, so have a spinning outfit rigged with a pitch bait in case you see other sails trailing the hooked fish.

SUMMER SAILS

CALM SEAS LET SMALL BOATERS TAP INTO GREAT SAILFISH ACTION.



From May through October, the prevailing stiff northeasterly winds are replaced by a gentle southeasterly breeze and often glass-calm sea conditions that allow small boats to effectively target sailfish. Light-tackle boats — many of which are designed to carry large quantities of live bait — now have an open invitation to visit the deep blue in search of billfish. Like most game species, sailfish follow set patterns to meet their needs for comfort, forage and, on occasion, reproduction. So base your search on those factors to increase your chances for success.

THE COMFORT ZONE

The deeper a fish dives, the colder the water, and since sailfish tolerate only 4- to 6-degree temperature swings, the majority stay in the top 30 feet of the water column. Palm Beach sailfish guru Nick Smith believes temperature breaks of as little as 1 or 2 degrees are big when trying to locate sails. Such breaks are fairly easy to find with the built-in temperature gauge on most fish finders as you look for visible rips, edges and well-defined current breaks. Anytime you have current pushing toward the surface hard enough to make an edge, one side of the edge will be warmer than the other. Pinpointing the side on which the sails are holding then becomes a matter of trial and error.

Smith drifts these temperature breaks with live baits, keeping several on the surface suspended from kites. He uses twist-on rubber-core sinkers above the leader on three other rods to deploy additional baits at staggered depths: one bait at 20 feet, another at 50 feet and a third at 70 feet below the surface to cover the entire water column. If a sail hits one of the deep baits, the other subsurface baits are adjusted to fish that same depth.

Cold water upwellings also impact the fish's movements. Prolonged periods of westerly winds blow the surface water out to sea, creating a vortex that pulls cold water out of the offshore canyons and toward shore. This often produces a thermocline that fish avoid, where surface temperatures remain in their normal range while the bottom half of the water column — where the denser cold water is — could be below 50 degrees.

While sailfish action usually occurs in 150 to 300 feet of water in winter and spring, the best temperature breaks during summer tend to be in 100- to 170-foot depths. And if the bait moves close to shore, it's not uncommon to find summer sails feeding in just 50 to 60 feet of water. However, the periodic upwellings described push sailfish to the surface and offshore. Then, the first green-to-blue color change is often where the fish gather, seeking the warmth of the Gulf Stream. Although comfort plays a major role in sailfish movements, a consistent food source is the single greatest determining factor: Sails won't remain in an area without the necessary forage for long. Summer is when the baitfish masses move closer to shore to spawn, and bait schools that remain offshore tend to relocate to bottom structure, around reefs and wrecks, for safety.

Lacking obvious temperature breaks, a successful day of summer sailfishing can be as simple as hopscotching from one likely spot to the next until you locate a body of fish. You might just pick off a fish or two here and there, but you'll probably have to deal with lots of little

BAIT INTEL

You'll need lots of live bait to chum for several hours and multiple livewells to separate the small chummer baits from the larger baits you fish with; otherwise, the latter will die from oxygen starvation.



SPANISH SARDINES

Look for 2- to 4-inch scaled sardines (aka pilchards), Spanish sardines and threadfin herring along beaches and inlets, over sandy or patchy bottom and around dock and bridge pilings. And use a 6- to 10-foot cast net with a 3/16-inch mesh – 1/4-inch mesh in August, when baits are larger. For sailfish baits, catch larger versions of the same species with



THREADFIN HERRING

Sabiki rigs – gentler on the baits than cast nets – and use a dehooking tool to remove them from the sabiki hooks. The frisky ones get most attention from predators, so get rid of baits hooked in the gills, bleeding or swimming slowly in the livewell.



PILCHARDS

SCOTT SALYERS (TOP); ILLUSTRATIONS BY DIANE ROME PEEBLES (3)



NET PROFIT: Small-mesh cast nets are preferred for acquiring a supply of live baits for chumming.

FRISKIES

1 Avoid handling live baits. Use a dehooker to remove them from the sabiki rig. 2 Pick the more brightly colored baits in the well; they're usually fresher and livelier. 3 Insert the hook in the nasal area to avoid injuring the baits and allow them to swim freely.







tunny, amberjack and barracuda between sailfish bites.

Live bait produces the most consistent action, and you want to use the kind most prevalent in the area. Once you've loaded the livewell, you can either slow-troll, drift and kite-fish or drift and live-chum, which are all effective methods of targeting sailfish.

TROLLING STRATEGIES

Slow-trolling pulls your baits through and around baitfish schools. As members of those schools change direction, your trolled baits are singled out as easy prey by sailfish balling bait — corralling them with their dorsal fin — and attacked.

An effective tactic for slow-trolling around bait schools is to add a 1- to 3-ounce barrel sinker just above the swivel; as the boat circles over a wreck, take it out of gear to allow the weighted baits to sink closer to the structure.

RICK DE PAIVA (LEFT); MIKE HOLLIDAY (CENTER); TED LUND (RIGHT)

SWS TACKLE BOX:

RODS: 7-foot, 20- to 40-pound class

REELS: 6000-size spinning or 30-pound-class conventional

LINES: 20- to 30-pound monofilament with 40- to 60-pound fluorocarbon leader

BAIT: Live threadfin herring, pilchards or Spanish sardines, or rigged ballyhoo



SUMMER JUMBOS: Summer isn't the time to use lighter gear. In Florida, summer sailfish run big (top).

AERIAL DISPLAY: Sailfish acrobatics are even more impressive when the water is calm (opposite left).

FOLLOW UP: Other sailfish often trail a hooked fish, so keep a pitch bait ready for them (opposite center).

WARM WATER CPR: In summer, it's often necessary to revive fish longer to ensure their survival (far right).

TED LUND

SUMMER SAILS

SAILFISH REGULARLY TRAVEL IN SMALL PODS DURING SUMMER.

After 30 seconds, put the motor back into gear. The baits are enticingly pulled away from the bait school, hopefully with a sail or two on their tails. This same tactic works when trolling rigged ballyhoo with teaser dredges, though not as effectively as with live bait.

DRIFTING OPTIONS

Drifting the bait schools is done with both surface and subsurface baits. For best results, position the boat up-current from a bait school and drift alongside or through the school. Once the boat drifts several hundred yards past the baitfish aggregation, slow-troll back into position for another drift.

Live-chumming from a drifting boat also works remarkably well on summer sailfish. Pilchards, threadfin herring or Spanish sardines, which can be cast-netted along the beaches, are used for chumming. The key is to stay on the outside edge of a bait school or the structure holding the bait so the livies you chum with don't join the school and get lost among thousands of others.

Live-chumming is also ideal when you're fishing temperature breaks because the boat scatters food along the entire temperature gradient while it drifts. The downside is that it draws a lot of little tunny, blue runners and remora. Mind you, while little tunny are often regarded as trash fish, the commotion they create when crashing chum baits will draw sailfish to the boat. And once the sails lock on the chum, they'll literally swim right up to the transom and ball up the baits you toss over the side. Then, you simply pitch out a hooked bait, and it's game on.

WATCH FOR TRAILERS

Summer sailfish regularly travel in small pods of two to six fish, but sometimes a large body of fish can be found in one area. It's always good to keep at least one bait in the water at all times — even while fighting a hooked fish — and have a spinning outfit rigged with a pitch bait in case you see other sails trailing the hooked fish.

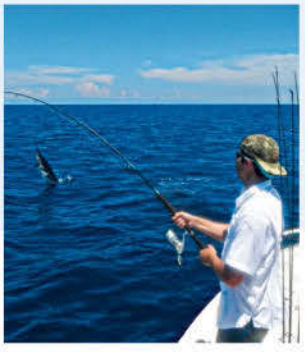
Last August, I scored big, live-chumming over structure in 250 feet of water. Each handful of chum brought at least one sail to the boat, and the two anglers on board went eight-for-nine in the span of only three hours. Every fish had followers, so as soon as they landed one sail, they hooked up and fought another one.

LAST AUGUST, I SCORED BIG, LIVE-CHUMMING OVER STRUCTURE IN 250 FEET OF WATER. EACH HANDFUL OF CHUM BROUGHT AT LEAST ONE SAILFISH TO THE BOAT, AND THE PAIR OF ANGLERS ON BOARD WENT EIGHT-FOR-NINE IN THE SPAN OF ONLY THREE HOURS. EVERY SINGLE FISH HAD FOLLOWERS, SO JUST AS SOON THEY LANDED ONE SAIL, THEY HOOKED AND FOUGHT ANOTHER ONE.

DEAD-BAIT TOO

Dead-bait trolling is not quite as effective during summer, but if you concentrate on spots where sailfish are most likely to hold, multiple shots a day are possible. And if you find a body of fish in one location, your odds of success should increase exponentially.

Whatever option you choose to target summer sails, keep in mind that they run large, so it's a good idea to step up to 30-pound from the usual 20-pound gear. Use 6/0 to 9/0 circle hooks, depending on bait size. The lack of swells and inclement weather keep the water clean, so fluorocarbon leaders are a must. Most anglers start with 60-pound and will drop as low as 40-pound if the bites don't come or fish swim up to the baits but refuse to eat.







MIKE HOLLIDAY (2); TED LUND (RIGHT)

MONSTER MAKOS

BY JIM HENDRICKS



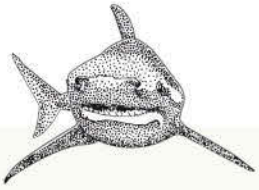
TOUGH CUSTOMER: Mako sharks make formidable adversaries for Southern California anglers.

IMMENSE MAKO SHARKS PROWL SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S OFFSHORE WATERS.



CHRIS AND MONIQUE FALLOWS/NATUREPL.COM

FROM THE COCKPIT OF THE 29-FOOT *STRIKE ZONE*, CAPT. STEVE QUINLAN AND DECK BOSS JOSHUA HENDRICKS SCAN THE 4-MILE-LONG CHUM SLICK. THEY SEE THE NERVOUS FLUTTERING OF SEA BIRDS. SOON THE MACKEREL IN THE SLICK – AND THE SEA LIONS FEEDING ON THEM – BEAT A HASTY RETREAT. A MAKO HAS CRASHED THE PARTY.



"HERE SHE COMES," SAYS QUINLAN. A MAKO OF STARTLING PROPORTIONS BREAKS THE SURFACE 50 FEET ASTERN, PUSHING A WAKE, THE DORSAL FIN KNIFING THE SWELLS. HENDRICKS BAITS A 14/0 HOOK WITH A SLAB OF TUNA BELLY AND TOSSES IT IN FRONT OF THE SHARK WHILE QUINLAN STANDS AT THE HELM. THE MAKO INHALES THE SLAB.

"I'M BIT," snaps Hendricks. With that, Quinlan starts the outboards and throttles ahead as Hendricks throws the reel in gear. Immediately, a 700-pound mako explodes 10 feet skyward — uncorking a cartwheeling vault — crashes back down, then smokes away on a 200-yard sprint. Team *Strike Zone* settles in for a long battle.

DANGEROUS GAME

If you're up for the challenge, Southern California offers consistent action for monster mako sharks, one of the world's largest and most dangerous game fish.

Few exceed Quinlan's experience with these impressive predators. Before adopting a catch-and-release policy, Quinlan weighed in more than a dozen makos over 500 pounds, including four over 700 pounds and three in excess of 1,000, topped by a 1,175-pounder. Since then, his team has released five fish over 1,000 pounds, including one estimated at more than 1,400 pounds.

SEAMOUNT SAVVY

Research indicates mako sharks detect bottom features even when they can't see them. In a California study, a tagged mako on the surface followed the contours of a canyon hundreds of feet below.

"Structure creates upwellings of nutrient-rich water that attracts plankton," says Quinlan. This attracts prey fish, and at the top of food chain is the mako.

Water conditions also play a role, says Quinlan. He looks for blue water — purple-blue water is best — with temperatures from 65 to 71 degrees. He studies temperature and chlorophyll charts looking for high spots where the right temperature and low chlorophyll content, an indication of blue water, coincide.

Quinlan also looks for the best wind and current. "You want the current opposing the wind," he explains. "The wind keeps the boat moving in one direction while the current carries the chum in the opposite direction. This extends the chum slick and increases the chances of a mako finding the scent."

GET CHUMMY

Chumming has proven to be the most effective method of attracting world-class makos. "Fresh fish is the best," Quinlan says. "I buy in bulk and grind it myself. It takes a day to produce enough chum for a one-day charter." Fillets and belly meat of tuna are best, but Quinlan also uses bonito and Pacific barracuda to create shoebox-size frozen blocks. He carries 200 to 300 pounds for each trip, as well as dozens of fish carcasses.

Quinlan uses two 5-gallon Slick Master chum buckets (one on each stern quarter) for dispersing the blocks and a gunnysack or two for hanging carcasses over the side. Every 10 minutes, he pulls the gunnysack onto the swim step and stomps on it to release as much scent as possible.

To get a head start on the chumming process, Quinlan uses a technique he calls



RON BALLANTI (BELOW, 3); JIM HENDRICKS

ALL BUSINESS: Wire leaders represent the only chance at landing a mako shark of any size, above.

BIG GUNS: Large sharks call for uncompromising tackle to handle the extreme pressure of the battle, left.

SWS PLANNER:

CALIFORNIA MAKO SHARKS

WHAT: Shortfin mako sharks

WHERE: Offshore ridges, canyons and seamounts off the Southern California coast

WHEN: June through October

WHO: Boating anglers with reliable craft from 25 feet up. A number of Southern California charter services focus on makos:

TROPHY FISHING CHARTERS
Capt. Steve Quinlan
714-357-2388
trophyfishingcharters.com

CALIFORNIA SHARK FISHING
Capt. Dave Trimble
619-296-1120
californiasharkfishing.com

WORLD CLASS SHARK FISHING
Capt. Brian Hyder
858-775-7812
worldclasssharkfishing.com

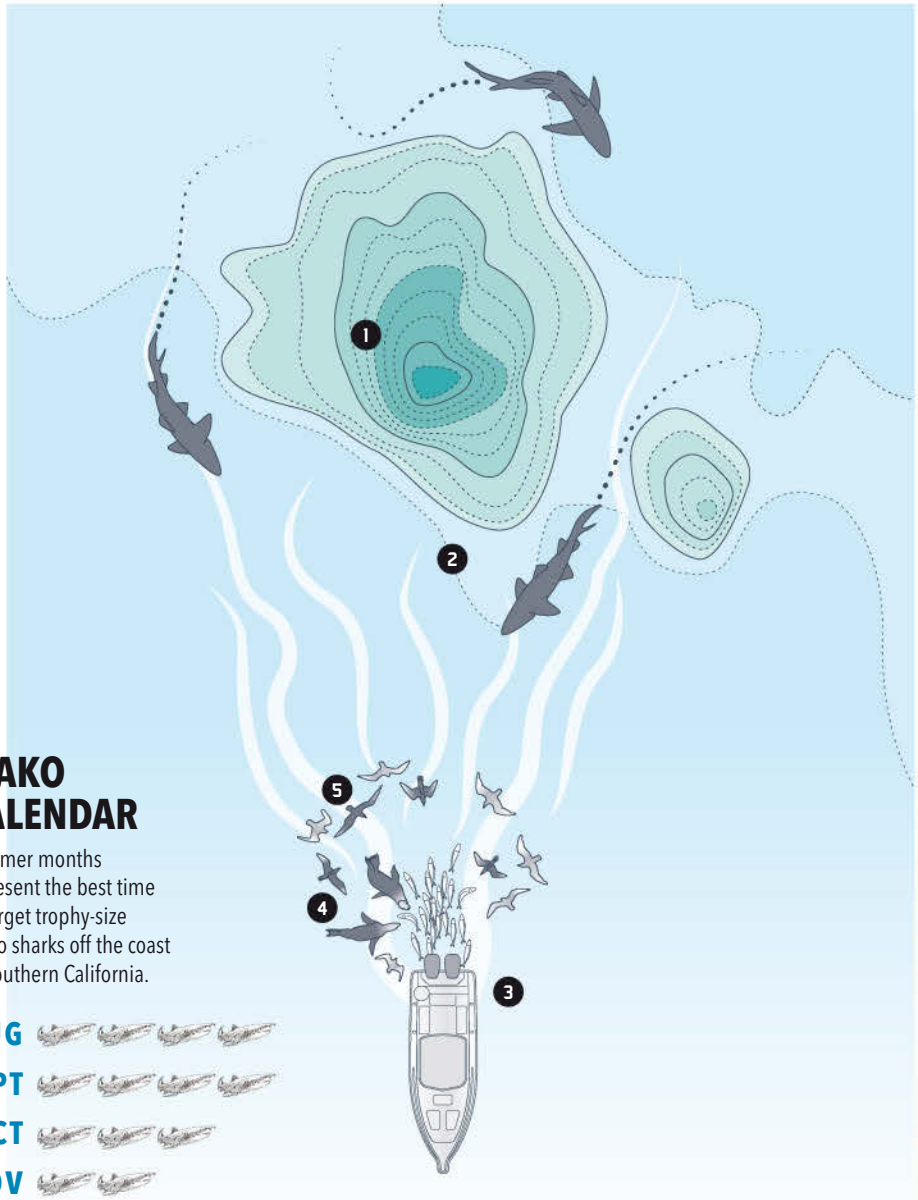


RELEASE TIME: The game isn't over until there's a successful release, center.





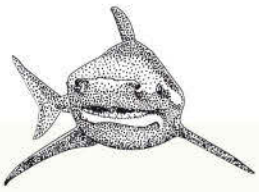
SOUP LINE: Extensive chumming is essential to draw makos within range.



MAKO CALENDAR

Summer months represent the best time to target trophy-size mako sharks off the coast of Southern California.





5 POINTS TO SUCCESS

1. HABITAT: Big mako sharks hang over structure where bait and sea lions – their preferred prey – gather.

2. ATTRACTANT: Set up a steady chum line, which can stretch for several miles, to draw makos within baiting range.

3. STEADY FLOW: A couple hundred pounds of ground fresh fish makes the chum line most effective.

4. TRUE TELL: Sea lions provide a reliable clue to finding big mako sharks, which can smell them in the water, and home in on their primary food source.

5. LOCATORS: Birds are the best indicator of the presence of bait, which attracts sea lions and, in turn, the makos.

"power chumming," which is particularly helpful when there is no wind.

"We put out the chum buckets and then motor at 3 or 4 knots toward and across the structure we want to fish," he explains. "We do this for about 2 miles, and then we shut down and drift."

Ideally, Quinlan likes to begin the chum slick about a mile or two upwind of the target area and power chum downwind, so he begins the drift slightly downwind of the structure. "We've caught fish on and around the high spot, but mostly to the inside (downwind) because our slick has covered more territory by then," he says.

While most anglers try to avoid sea lions when fishing, Quinlan considers them an ally. Like great whites, mako sharks feed on sea lions. "If a mako smells sea lion poop in the slick, she knows she's on the right track," Quinlan says.

WAIT TO BAIT

Team *Strike Zone* doesn't put a bait in the water until they eyeball a fish they want to catch. Once the team spots a trophy-size mako, things gets serious. Quinlan emphasizes the importance of teamwork. "Josh and I already know who is going to toss the bait, who drives the boat and who is going to fight the fish before a mako ever shows up," he says.

Most makos charge in hot and ready to eat, Quinlan says. Yet there are some tricks to baiting them. The bait should match the chum, Quinlan believes. "If you're chumming with bonito or barracuda, you wouldn't throw the fish a squid." Avoid using whole fish. The shark is eating pieces of chum, so it won't hesitate to eat another piece, such as a slab of belly meat. It's also easier to sink the hook into the mako with a smaller piece of bait.

With the heavy tackle used for monster makos, you really can't cast. So Hendricks literally pitches a bait to a charging mako. "You don't have to get too close," he says. "These fish swim for a living and can usually find the bait on their own.



SHIMANO TALLUS

AFTCO MAXFORCE HARNESS



SHIMANO TIAGRA 50W

"Yet, you want to get it away from the boat, so the fish doesn't swim underneath the hull and tangle the line in the running gear before you even get a chance to set the hook."

KEEP MOVING

Once a fish picks up the bait, Quinlan motors away while the angler puts the reel in gear and sets the hook.

"You want to keep the shark at a respectable distance, off either corner of the transom," Quinlan says. Rambunctious makos have been known to leap into the boat.

Quinlan learned years ago to keep the boat moving while fighting a huge mako. He once lost a big fish when he pulled the engine out of gear near the end of the battle, and the fish crossed under the boat and broke off.

"Keep moving. That puts you in control," he says. "We also change directions often to keep the fish from getting comfortable. That usually forces them to run or jump, and that's what wears them down.

"There's no sense in pressuring a big fish early. You want a big mako tired when it's close to the boat," he says. The team knows that the endgame is near when the fish's dorsal and tail are out of the water.

With the boat idling forward and the angler drawing the fish near, Hendricks leaders it. If it lunges, he lets go and Quinlan motors away. If not, he holds the fish boat-side while Quinlan slides aft to remove the hook and release the fish. If the hook is deep, they use cable cutters to release the shark.

Catching a fish that's 10 feet long, 4 feet wide and capable of inflicting deadly wounds with its teeth and tail might not be for everyone. Success hinges on dedication, the right equipment, and confidence in your crew.

This is what it takes to score monster makos.

SWS TACKLE BOX:

The proper tackle is critical when dealing with immense fish, long battles and high drag pressures.

RODS: 5½-foot bent-butt all-roller heavy-action stand-up rods

REELS: Large lever-drag two-speed reels such as Shimano Tiagra 50WA or Penn International 50VSW

LINE: 80-pound monofilament

TERMINAL RIG: 15 feet of 900-pound-test stainless-steel cable double-swaged to a 14/0 to 16/0 J hook at one end and a 350-pound barrel swivel at the other end

OTHER: Quality fighting belts and harnesses are essential. The crew aboard *Strike Zone* prefers Aftco's Maxforce belt and harness system.



ILLUSTRATION BY TIM BARKER (OPPOSITE)

HUNTING GROUNDS

HOT SPOT: Seamounts and ridges off the Southern California coast offer productive mako fishing. Precise locations require accurate charts. For specific areas, refer to *Sportfishing Atlas, Southern California Edition, Baja Directions* ($49.97; bajadirections.com), which includes charts and lat/long listings for all of these spots.



SWS PLANNER:

MID-ATLANTIC WHITE MARLIN

WHAT: Live-baiting for white marlin

WHEN: June to October, with late August and early September prime time

WHERE: Virginia Beach, Virginia

WHO: When it comes to billfish, these charter captains are your best bet:

CAPT. RANDY BUTLER, *REBEL*
757-761-6402
rebelsportfishing.com

CAPT. PAT FOSTER, *WAVE RUNNER*
757-377-5018
vbsportfishing.com

CAPT. JOE DELCAMPO, *CAPT. CHERYL*
757-639-8363
virginiafishing.com

CAPT. RUSS KOSTINAS, *TOP NOTCH*
757-681-8068
fishtopnotch.com

LIVE OPTION: The extra effort spent to procure live bait pays off.

LIVE ACTION

MID-ATLANTIC ANGLERS TALLY HIGH NUMBERS OF WHITE MARLIN WITH LIVE BAIT.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
RIC BURNLEY



LIVE ACTION!

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RIC BURNLEY

When I saw the flags, my jaw dropped. I tried to count, but there were too many. Later, Capt. Randy Butler confirmed that 50 marlin flags decorated the riggers of his Virginia Beach charter boat, *Rebel*. In less than 24 hours, Butler and his crew had scored more white marlin than most anglers catch in a lifetime. When other boats returned to port flying just two or three flags, Butler had 50. What was his secret? Live bait.

LIVE AND LET LIVE

On a steamy August morning, I met Butler and the *Rebel* crew at the Virginia Beach Fishing Center. Butler, a Virginia native, grew up hearing stories of skippers scoring epic numbers of white marlin using live bait, and a few years ago, he started experimenting with the technique.

"People see the flags and assume it is easy," Butler warns as we motored out of Rudee Inlet and pointed the boat toward Norfolk Canyon, 50 miles away. He explains that catching bait is key to catching marlin. He finds schools of tinker mackerel piled on the bottom in 50 to 120 fathoms on the edge of the canyon. The bait is available all summer and most of the fall, but the best pickings are late August and early September. "Some days I have to work hard just to scratch together a handful of baits," he admits, "but I can turn each one into a marlin."

Once on the fishing grounds, the crew went to work catching bait with medium-heavy jigging rods spooled with 60-pound braid and armed with a five-hook mackerel rig consisting of 5/0 long-shank hooks, each under a short piece of brightly colored surgical tubing, baited with a small chunk of albacore. Like a giant sabiki rig weighted with 20 ounces of lead, the crew bounced it off the bottom 50 fathoms below while the boat drifted through expansive bait schools showing on Butler's fish finder.

Bringing tinkers in two and three at a time, it didn't take long to get a dozen baits in the livewell. Once ready to go, rigged baits were slipped into small tuna tubes. "The tuna tubes make the baits feisty," Butler explains.

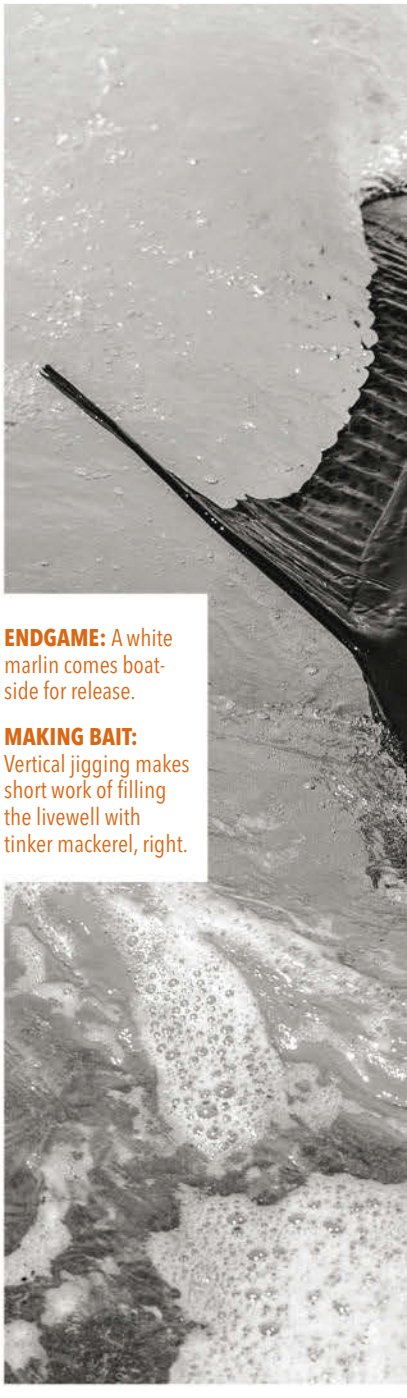
SPREAD THIN

Butler stays in the same area where he was marking bait. "We won't go more than 2 miles all day," he says, adding that the marlin don't wander far from the kitchen.

Meanwhile, mates Michael Butler and Fernando Sosa set out the spread, which resembled a standard trolling spread — except we were moving at just 2 knots. Butler runs squid-chain teasers on each side, built out of 9-inch rubber squid punctuated with a naked horse ballyhoo. Then he deploys a triple-mullet dredge on both sides of the boat.

The mates each bridle a live tinker to an 8/0 circle hook. Sosa explains that bridling the mackerel leaves the hook clear to find the corner of a marlin's mouth more easily.

The crew dropped a live bait off both short and long riggers. Butler kept the boat moving



ENDGAME: A white marlin comes boatside for release.

MAKING BAIT: Vertical jigging makes short work of filling the livewell with tinker mackerel, right.



GAME TIME: A marlin drawn to the spread by the teasers finds the rigged bait and piles on.





SWS TACKLE BOX:

MID-ATLANTIC WHITE MARLIN

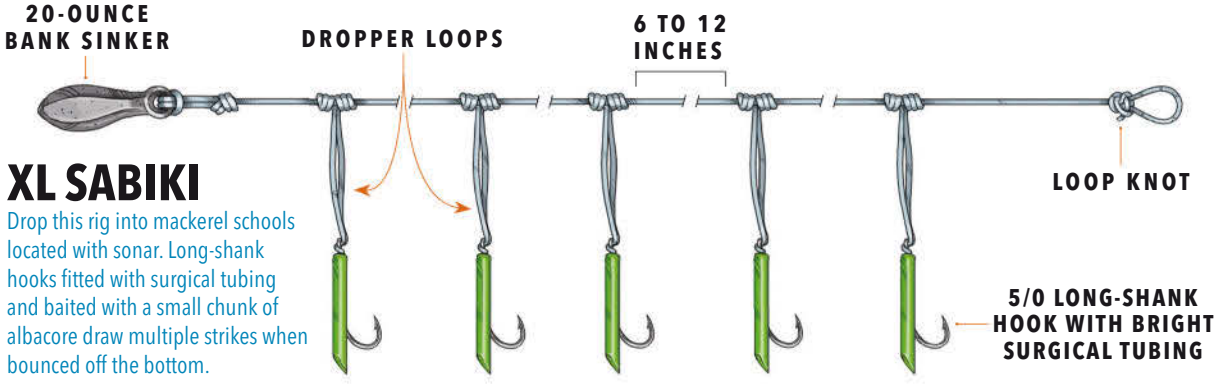
RODS: 6-foot, 50-pound class stand-up

REELS: 50-pound class lever drag

LINE: 30-pound-test monofilament

LEADER: 20 feet of 50-pound mono top shot joined to the main line with Bimini/no-name knot, with a 150-pound snap swivel on the end, clipped to a surgeon's loop in 5 feet of 80-pound fluoro leader, with an 8/0 circle hook snelled to the end.

BAITS: Bridled live tinker mackerel



XL SABIKI

Drop this rig into mackerel schools located with sonar. Long-shank hooks fitted with surgical tubing and baited with a small chunk of albacore draw multiple strikes when bounced off the bottom.

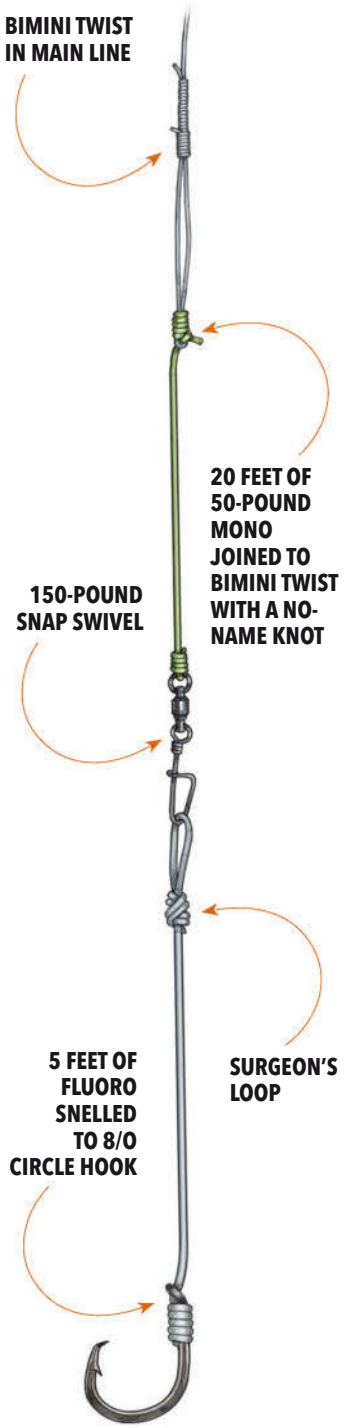
ILLUSTRATION BY JOE MAHLER / JOEMAHLER.COM

LIVE ACTION!

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RIC BURNLEY

TERMINAL RIG

This setup allows for leadering fish boat-side and enables quick leader and bait changes.



just fast enough to keep the baits on the surface. "Tinker mackerel work so well because they swim fast enough to keep up with the boat," he explains.

It didn't take long for the marlin to notice.

Nothing in fishing is more exciting than a white marlin coming in hot on a ballyhoo skipping along at 7 knots. But it takes a sharp eye to spot one of these fish, and the whole thing is over in seconds.

Not so with live bait. I don't know who spotted the white marlin first, but I saw it swimming circles around one of the baits. In just a few seconds, everyone aboard watched as the fish began tracking the live bait.



TWICE BITTEN

When it billed the bait, Sosa dropped the reel out of gear, and the marlin came up and took the bait like a trout rising to a dry fly. Once the fish started to swim away, Sosa engaged the drag, cranked the line tight and gave the rod tip a slow jab to let the circle hook catch. That's when the marlin hit the air and the drag screamed.

At the same time, the captain was on the bridge dropping back to a second fish when he spotted a third marlin in the spread, and his son shot a pitch bait to the window-shopper. With three fish in the air behind the boat, Butler slowed the engines and let the anglers work their fish. He left the remaining live baits out, and once everything was under control, the crew cleared the dredge and teasers and Butler backed *Rebel* toward the fish. All through the fight, he left the live baits dangling from the riggers. "The action often brings in more fish," he explains, "And we keep a couple live baits rigged up to pitch to marlin when all four lines go down."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOE MAHLER / JOEMAHLER.COM (5)

BRIDLE UP

Start with the 8/0 circle hook snelled to your leader and an 8-inch piece of rigging floss tied in a loop.



After the fish were released, Butler returned to slow-trolling. It took only a few minutes before another fish circled the baits. By keeping the baits out and an eye on the water, the crew turned single bites into doubles and triples. We caught a sailfish, then hooked and lost a blue marlin. By the end of the day, we had a dozen flags flying.

Heading back to the dock, Butler explains the advantages of live bait. "Anglers love being able to watch the fish come into the baits," he says. "And there is a lot of action." Many of his anglers even enjoy catching bait. Opponents of live-baiting say it's difficult to tempt marlin on ballyhoo when other boats are dangling live baits, and the slow pace keeps the live-baiters on the hot spots longer, preventing dead-baiters from getting to the fish. Butler argues that the technique is best employed on either side of Norfolk Canyon, so hundreds of miles of prime water are available to conventional trollers.

Still, the technique has been outlawed in most of the bigger tournaments. "That's fine," he says with a chuckle. "We haven't forgotten how to catch them trolling." As Michael hoisted one flag after another up the rigger, the party stood in the cockpit, taking pictures and clinking cans. They would long remember their day catching marlin on live bait.



BRAGGING RIGHTS: Have plenty of release flags on board when live-baiting mid-Atlantic white marlin.

AIRBORNE: Above, a fish nearing the boat reacts to the increased pressure by jumping.

CREATE A STIR: Opposite, squid and mullet teasers draw attention to the trolled baits.



Loop the floss over the hook, then run the other end through the nose of the mackerel with a rigging needle.



Insert the point of hook through the free end of the loop and twist the hook to tighten the floss against the bait's head.



Pass the point of the hook between the twisted floss and the bait, from back to front.



The circle hook riding atop the bait allows the mackerel to swim naturally, offering maximum exposure for a hookup.

A SMALL ISLAND WITH BIG FISH POTENTIAL AND A BONANZA OF SPECIES TO BOOT.

BIMINI BENDER

STORY AND PHOTOS BY GEORGE POVEROMO

KEITH BRACK HAD A HOT HAND. HAVING RELEASED HIS FIRST SAILFISH ONE YEAR EARLIER, HE RETURNED TO BIMINI THE FOLLOWING JUNE TO CHASE HIS DREAM FISH: A BLUE MARLIN. ON THE FIRST DAY, TROLLING ALONG THE LEDGE OFF BIMINI, HE HOOKED UP. AS A HOT BLUE MARLIN TOOK TO THE AIR AND LINE RACED OFF THE REEL, KEITH'S FATHER, BOBBY, AND I CRANKED IN THE REMAINING LINES, THEN GAVE CHASE. A HARD-FOUGHT HOUR LATER, OUR ECSTATIC ANGLER SAW HIS FIRST BLUE MARLIN RELEASED. BUT HIS STORY DOESN'T END THERE. THE NEXT DAY, HE SCORED YET ANOTHER BLUE MARLIN AFTER A 90-MINUTE BATTLE. THAT'S THE BIMINI WE LOVE.



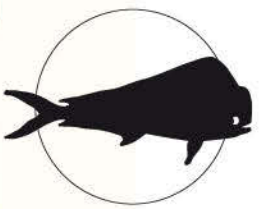
WELCOME DINER: Grouper are among the many species available to anglers in Bimini waters.

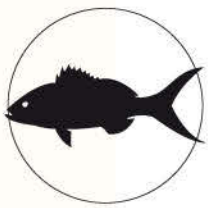
FAST FACTS FOR SUCCESS

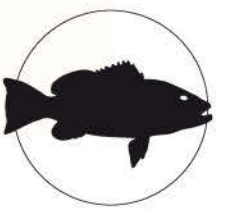
GOLD STRIKE: Dolphin, from small schoolies to large adults, ride the edge of the Gulf Stream, near the island. Troll lures rigged with ballyhoo to cash in.

BETTER LIVE: In Bimini, nothing opens Pandora's box like live bait. Drop a live pilchard, goggle-eye, pinfish or yellowtail to the bottom, and just hang on.

SLIDIN' BY: A sliding sinker rig with a long 20-foot fluorocarbon leader is often the key to catching wary mutton snapper.









BIG BLUES: Bimini is a famous marlin destination, but dolphin also abound.

BLUE-WATER BENCHMARK



TACKLE BOX:

OFFSHORE TROLLING TACKLE: Penn International 50 and 70 or equivalent reels with matching rods

LINE: 50- and 80-pound mono, respectively, and 300-pound mono leaders

RIG: Small chugger, flat-head or Ilander lure rigged with big ballyhoo

Marlin fishing put Bimini on the map. Until June 2011, when a 1,119-pound blue was captured off Treasure Cay, it was the only place in the Bahamas that yielded a grander, a 1,060.5-pound fish taken in 1979. Late spring into summer offers prime trolling for dolphin and blue marlin, which remains one of my passions. But as the months play on and these fish migrate through, numerous other players coax us across the Stream. Downtime is rare here, provided you know where to focus your efforts.

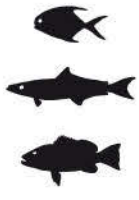


BACKCOUNTRY, BIMINI STYLE

The vast, yet shallow bank behind Bimini is scattered with the remnants of ill-fated prop planes and boats. Locate such a find, and they are often loaded with mangrove snapper, barracuda and — on some of the better pieces — both permit and cobia.

Last season, Harry Vernon III and I went wreck-hopping off Bimini. Having procured a couple dozen live crabs before we crossed, our goal was to catch a permit. Many times we've seen these prestigious game fish perusing the deeper sections of flats, rocky shorelines and even

BACKCOUNTRY, BIMINI STYLE



WRECKING CREW: Permit and cobia are the headliners, but wrecks away from the flats also yield various jacks, snappers and groupers.



some wrecks. As luck would have it, we found them at our first stop. In less than 90 minutes, we caught and released eight permit upward of 25 pounds.

When fishing for permit around the wrecks, please do it responsibly and release them. Avoid light tackle because these fish will surely break off in the structure. Better to use stout gear so they're still relatively green when brought alongside the boat, which bodes well for their survival. Keep a live crab, the ideal bait, ready to pitch at fish that you discover circling the perimeter; soak one on the bottom near any structure for deep-rooting fish.



TACKLE BOX:

BACKCOUNTRY WRECK TACKLE: Stout 30-pound spinning

LINE: 30- to 50-pound braid, with 30- to 60-pound fluoro leaders

HOOKS: 2x strong 3/0 circle hooks

BAIT: Live crabs best for permit, pilchards or pinfish for cobia and bottomfish



YELLOWTAIL HEAVEN

Bimini yellowtails are plentiful, often big, and available year-round. While one of the most consistent fisheries, yellowtails can become one of the most challenging. For starters, locate solid reef structure, with the best zones for larger fish between 60 and 80 feet. Atlantic side wrecks also draw big yellowtail. Then it's all about the current: Moving water stimulates feeding, whereas slack water kills the bite.

Predator fish pose a big challenge too, with sharks, amberjack and horse-eye jacks often crashing a good yellowtail party. It's a fine line, pun intended, between scaling down leader and hook size to coax bites from bigger fish, but not to where you can't reel it in fast enough to stay ahead of the sharks and amberjack. When chum-lining a silverside, a tiny piece of bonito, ballyhoo or squid, tie a No. 2 circle hook straight to an outfit spooled with 12 or 20-pound mono. Small yellow jigs tipped with a silverside or piece of bait and free-lined in the chum slick work well, especially in a moderate current.

Successful yellowtailing easily burns up a dozen blocks of chum soaked in a large-mesh chum bag. When searching for a spot to anchor, zoom in on the lower 20 feet on the sonar and scour the reefs for sharp structure and signs of life. Dragging a chum bag while slowly moving about helps disperse chum, raises the yellowtails and draws them to the boat when anchored.

When the 'tails are up, remember these two crucial items: To fool yellowtail into taking a bait, flip it into the chum slick, point the rod tip to the water and strip off line. As long as the bait drifts at the same rate as the chum particles, it should get picked off. Upon hookup, do not pump and wind. Instead, rapidly reel the fish in a straight line. Along with the erratic fight, pump and wind makes yellowtail easy prey for sharks or amberjacks. Wound straight in, the fish appears to be swimming to the surface with no handicap.

TACKLE BOX:

YELLOWTAIL TACKLE: 12- to 20-pound spinning

LINE: 12- to 20-pound mono, or 20-pound braid with 100 feet of 15-pound fluoro top shot

RIGS: No. 2 to 2/0 circle hooks tied directly to the fishing line; opt for 1/16-ounce yellow jigs or add small split shots in a moderate current.

BAIT: Silversides are best, followed by ballyhoo and bonito cut into small pieces.

OTHER: Carry one dozen 5-pound blocks of frozen chum per day of fishing.

YELLOWTAIL HEAVEN

CHASIN' FLAGS: The best depth for big yellowtail is 60 to 80 feet of water.

WILD, WILD EAST!

Anchoring and chumming sets up a lot of other opportunities, especially when using live pilchards caught locally or brought from South Florida. Send a live bait to bottom on a mutton rig, a three-way swivel joining the fishing line to a 20-foot leader of 50-pound-test fluorocarbon and a 4/0 circle hook, with the third eye carrying the weight on a foot of lighter mono, which breaks first if you snag bottom. You'll score mutton snapper, grouper, amberjack and horse-eye jack with this, whereas a live goggle-eye, live yellowtail or live cero mackerel floated well back in the chum slick under a balloon attracts big king mackerel.

For live-baiting kings, we use a conventional reel filled with 20-pound mono followed with a 20-foot wind-on leader of 30-pound fluorocarbon and a dual-hook stinger rig fabricated from 2 feet of 50-pound titanium wire, joined to the fishing line with a small barrel swivel. Choose 5/0 to 6/0 in-line circle hooks based on bait size.

When dropping live baits, stay with stout tackle because big black grouper live on these reefs. Our "light" bottom outfits for pilchards are conventional reels filled with 50-pound braid with 50-pound-test fluorocarbon leaders. Our "heavy" outfit, used for dropping a big live bait, (live goggle-eye or yellowtail) is a larger conventional reel spooled with 80- to 100-pound braid, an 8-foot, 130-pound fluorocarbon leader and a 3x strong 9/0 circle hook. An egg sinker heavy enough to hold bottom rides on the fishing line, stopped only by the swivel connecting the line to the leader.

The beauty of dropping anything live to the bottom along Bimini's reefs is that you just don't know what exactly is going to take the bait. But one thing is certain: Whatever does will pin you tight against the gunwales and have you winding for all you're worth.

Yes, this is the Bimini we know and love.

SMOKER KINGS

KING-SIZE MEAL: Live yellowtail and cero mackerel are top baits for kings.



TACKLE BOX:

SMOKER KINGS

TACKLE: Penn Fathom or Torque 40 NLD2, or equivalent reels with matching rods

LINE: 20-pound mono and 30-pound fluorocarbon wind-on leaders

RIG: Terminator Titanium stinger rig with two circle hooks suspended on the surface with a balloon float

BAIT: Live cero mackerel or yellowtail

SWS PLANNER

North Bimini is undergoing significant change through development. A casino is here already, complete with ferry service from South Florida. To date, the fishing remains good, but one can only wonder how development and increasing pressures on the fisheries will



play out in the future. Yet, Bimini remains a welcoming and productive fishing getaway, a mere 50 miles from Miami.

My favorite place to stay is Bimini Sands (the biminisands.com) in South Bimini. This well-kept facility offers floating dockage, fuel, ice and two restaurants. Clearing customs is easy; Bimini Sands shuttles you to the airport, where you clear, and then they take you back to the marina. Bonefishing and offshore charters can be arranged; on site, Neal Watson's Bimini Scuba Center serves those who'd rather have their fun underwater. Watson also conducts shark dives.

It is imperative to bring all the necessary fishing gear and chum because little can be procured once in Bimini. I order all of my chum and bottom baits through Baitmasters of South Florida, baitmasters.com.





FAST BONUS: Kings ranging from 15-pounders to smokers three times that size patrol reef edges and wrecks.

BIG RED: Sizable red grouper, and even larger blacks, are common bottomfishing catches in Bimini.

TACKLE BOX:

REEF BOTTOMFISHING TACKLE: Lever-drag two-speed reels like Penn Torque 40 NLD2, Fathom 25 NLD2 or equivalent with matching rods for snapper; heavier 80-pound conventional outfit for grouper, amberjack and horse-eye jacks

LINE: 50-pound braid and 50- to 80-pound fluorocarbon leaders for lighter two-speed reels, 80-pound braid and 130-pound fluorocarbon leader for heavier outfit

RIGS: Three-way swivel rig with 4/0 circle hook on 50-pound tackle for mutton snapper; 3x 9/0 circle hook for big grouper on heavier gear; knocker rig (egg sinker slides down to the hook) with 2/0 to 3/0 circle hook for mangrove snapper

BAIT: Ballyhoo plug (head and tail cut off), section of goggle-eye, bonito, or live pilchard for muttons; live yellowtail or goggle-eye, or half a yellowtail for big grouper, amberjack and horse-eye jacks; live pilchards for mangrove snapper

WILD, WILD EAST!

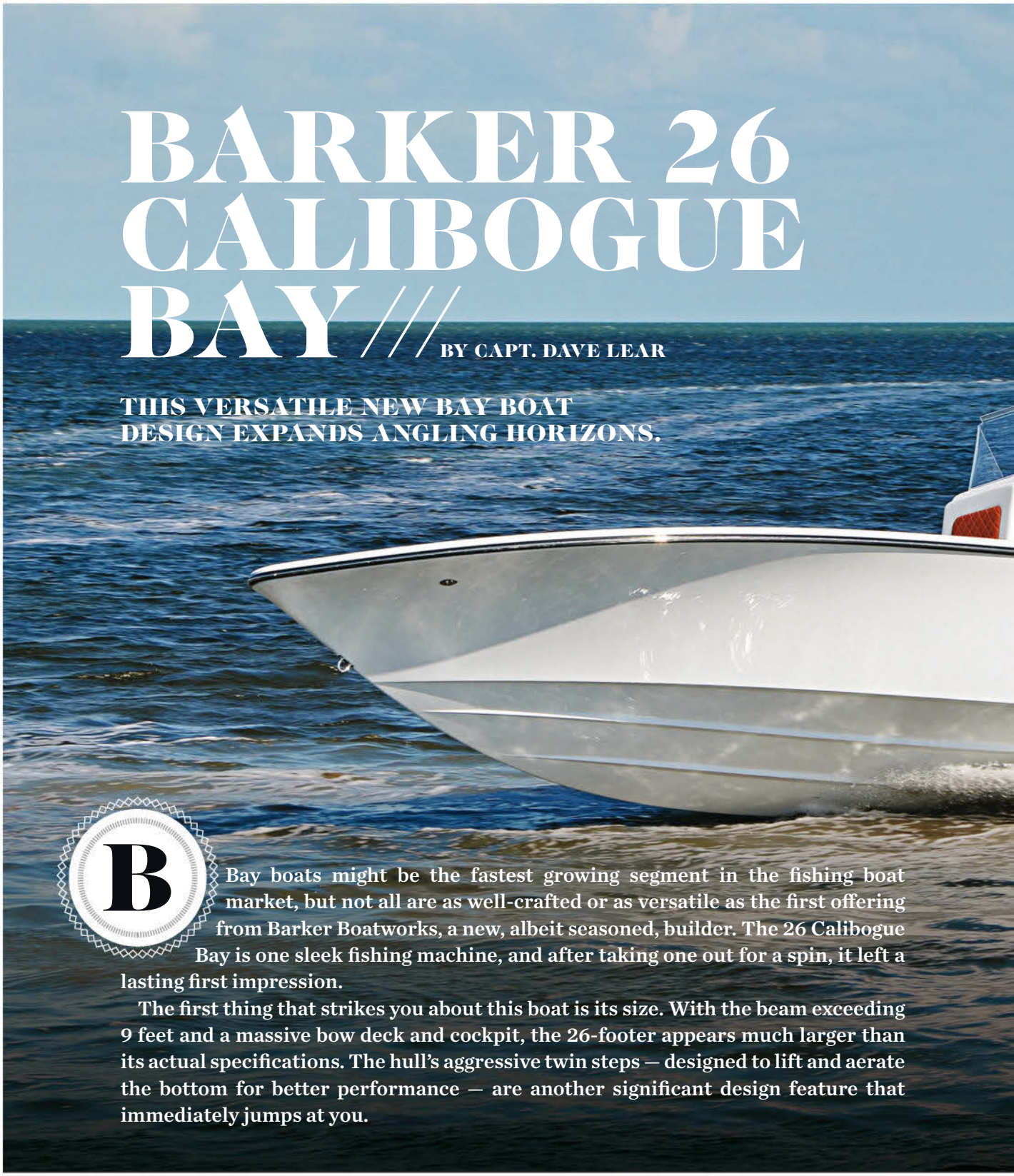


REEF LIFE: Scores of bottomfish, many great table fare, inhabit area reefs.

BARKER 26 CALIBOGUE BAY

BY CAPT. DAVE LEAR

THIS VERSATILE NEW BAY BOAT DESIGN EXPANDS ANGLING HORIZONS.



Bay boats might be the fastest growing segment in the fishing boat market, but not all are as well-crafted or as versatile as the first offering from Barker Boatworks, a new, albeit seasoned, builder. The 26 Calibogue Bay is one sleek fishing machine, and after taking one out for a spin, it left a lasting first impression.

The first thing that strikes you about this boat is its size. With the beam exceeding 9 feet and a massive bow deck and cockpit, the 26-footer appears much larger than its actual specifications. The hull's aggressive twin steps — designed to lift and aerate the bottom for better performance — are another significant design feature that immediately jumps at you.

LENGTH: 25'6"	**BEAM:** 9'3"	**DRAFT:** 16"	**DEADRISE:** 18 degrees	**FUEL:** 90 gal.	**WATER:** 15 gal.
WEIGHT: 4,250 lb.	**MAX HP:** 400	**PRICE:** $109,500 w/ Mercury Verado Pro 300		**BARKER BOATWORKS:** barkerboatworks.com	



TEST CONDITIONS

WEATHER: PARTLY CLOUDY

LOCATION: SARASOTA, FLORIDA

WIND: SOUTHWEST AT 15 KNOTS

SEA STATE: CHOPPY

TEST LOAD: TWO ADULTS, 45 GALLONS OF FUEL AND 10 GALLONS OF WATER



The colossal console houses a compartment large enough for a portable head, with access to helm electronics and wiring.



The aft livewell's clear hatch lets you monitor bait throughout the day or your catch on the way to the tournament weigh-in.



With holders for up to two dozen rods, anglers carry enough of an arsenal to target several species, inshore and off.



Multiple compartments in the bow have foam inserts in the lids, offering dry storage for safety gear, tackle and even extra rods.



Despite its substantial dimensions and heft, inshore enthusiasts don't need to worry about the Barker's draft. Redfish and other shallow-water game fish, however, should fret. To help flats and bay pursuits, options include a bow-mount trolling motor and single or twin Power-Pole anchoring systems like those on the test boat. The pair of Blades was ingeniously rigged with rod/cup holder combos. In addition, there are plenty of places to stow tackle on board. Vertical rod racks straddle both sides of the console, a rocket launcher is mounted on the leaning post, and there's horizontal rod storage in the covering boards. Combine all that with the lockable storage in the bow and anglers have more than enough room to carry an array of tackle.

The console is enormous and easily accommodates a 19-inch Garmin touch multifunction display, plus gauges, digital switches and LED battery monitors, all arranged for easy viewing and reach. A pair of Uflex paddle controls on the steering column enable adjustments to the trim and jack plate while underway and without taking your hands off the wheel. The acrylic windshield is high enough to be effective without hindering the line of sight, and twin angled footrests optimize the comfort level for the helmsman and a companion.

The cushioned console forward seat for two lifts to reveal a roomy step-down head compartment with quick access to pumps, battery switches and wiring panels, in addition to an optional Thetford portable head. The wire traces are impeccably organized and labeled. In fact, everywhere you look, examples of meticulous craftsmanship and top quality components are evident.

Moving forward, large insulated fish boxes frame the dry-storage compartment along the centerline on the bow casting deck. Molded receptacle rings for buckets come standard, along with heavy-duty hardware and gas-assist struts, and Barker covers the inside of all hatch lids with closed-cell foam inserts to deaden sound and ensure waterproof integrity. A 15-gallon pitch-bait well with acrylic lid is conveniently located just aft of the anchor locker. The lid has friction hinges, so it won't snag a cast net.

On the stern casting deck, a folding bench seat makes a comfortable perch for long runs to the fishing grounds. The bottom cushion lifts to reveal a nestled storage compartment, which in turn lifts to access the bilge. A larger 45-gallon livewell, also with acrylic lid and friction hinges, carries an additional supply of bait or keeps trophy redfish alive until reaching the tournament weigh-in.

Our jaunt on Sarasota Bay allowed us to truly test the mettle of the 26 Calibogue. An approaching squall line had stacked the water into confused whitecaps. But it didn't matter. The Barker ran on top and gobbled the chop faster than a high school football team at an all-you-can-eat buffet, and we stayed dry regardless of the compass heading. As a factory-direct custom builder, Barker can rig the boat with one of several engine makes and models. Our test boat was powered with a 300 hp Mercury Verado Pro, which produced a top speed of nearly 61 mph and forced us to steady ourselves during takeoff from the hole-shot torque. Dialing back to 4,000 rpm, we burned just under 14 gph doing almost 38 mph, according to the GPS.

By definition, bay boats are designed to cross large expanses of open water and fish in fairly shallow depths. The Barker 26 aces that assignment, and it also affords you the opportunity to chase dolphin or sailfish offshore when the weather settles. No matter what the float plan calls for, this boat is sure to prove a top performer.



PERFORMANCE

BAY EXPRESS

Powered by a Mercury Verado Pro 300, the Barker jumps on plane instantly – an asset in shallow water – and it exceeds 60 mph.

RPM	MPH	GPH
4,000	37.9	13.8
4,500	44.9	18.4
5,000	51.2	24.3
5,500	54.3	26.1
6,000	60.8	30.0

w/ Mercury Verado Pro 300



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STAMAS 390 AEGEAN///

A STRIKING FISHING MACHINE LADEN WITH CREATURE COMFORTS.

BY CAPT. DAVE LEAR



I've always favored center consoles, but the new Stamas 390 Aegean makes an undeniable case for cabin boats. Fishing is clearly a top priority in the design, yet the boat's configuration and a wealth of appointments provide a level of comfort bound to earn big points with the family and make overnight trips a pleasure.

Stamas certainly knows how to build tough boats, a virtue in big seas. Pressure-treated, kiln-dried Douglas fir fully encapsulated in glass is used for the stringer system. The grid is installed and allowed to cure in the mold for a true running surface. A vinylester-skin coat covers the solid fiberglass bottom and the cored sides and deck.

LENGTH: 41'2"	**BEAM:** 12'6"	**DRAFT:** 23"	**FUEL:** 410 gal.	**WATER:** 40 gal.
WEIGHT: 14,200 lb.	**MAX HP:** 1,050	**BASE PRICE:** $363,001 w/ triple Yamaha F300s		**STAMAS YACHT:** stamas.com



TEST CONDITIONS

WEATHER: CLEAR AND SUNNY

LOCATION: TARPON SPRINGS, FLORIDA

WIND: LIGHT AND VARIABLE

SEA STATE: LIGHT CHOP

TEST LOAD: TWO ADULTS, 200 GALLONS OF FUEL



The roomy cabin includes all the amenities for extended fishing trips and family outings.



The starboard helm allows for easy monitoring of electronics and stress-free operation.



The large tackle center lets you rig baits and store terminal tackle for a successful day offshore.



Two large livewells in the transom make it convenient to carry different types of bait.



Anchor windlass and ground tackle, a 20-amp battery charger, high-pressure water system with heater, folding aft bench seat and a fiberglass hardtop with four rod holders and powder-coated spread lights are all standard. The extensive fishing amenities include additional rod storage in the gunwale racks and holders in the covering boards, a large bait-prep center to starboard equipped with a freshwater sink, cutting board, tool rack and locking tackle storage. A pair of boxes in the transom — 92 and 120 quarts, respectively — are plumbed as livewells, while an aft 210-quart fish box with overboard drain holds the day's catch. Taco Grand Slam outriggers are an available add-on.

The combination port seating arrangement is the perfect spot to keep an eye on the baits or chat with the helmsman. The starboard helm seat offers unrestricted visibility, and it flips forward to access an insulated cooler with overboard drain. All system switches and gauges are easy to monitor, and the large electronics panel accommodates twin flush-mount displays.

A down-sliding hatch provides access to the bright and spacious air-conditioned cabin, with plenty of storage for extended trips. A dinette to port is balanced by a head compartment to starboard roomier than most studio apartments. The queen berth in the forepeak offers a relaxing respite, and the midberth under the helm deck — accented in classic teak and holly — goes beyond the usual catchall, accommodating two adults comfortably while offering additional rod storage on an aft bulkhead.

The entire cockpit deck raises for easy maintenance on electric lifts with hydraulic assists. A day hatch in the aft cockpit deck is handy for quick checks while underway. Teleflex power-assisted steering comes standard; a bow thruster and Teleflex joystick for docking are among the notable options.

Throttling out to the open gulf, it was evident the 390 Aegean is as solid as all other Stamas models I've tested. The boat punches through the waves effortlessly. Outboard strakes turn downward 10 degrees producing lift and a bone-dry ride. With its Euro transom and lengthy running surface, the 390 settles immediately upon acceleration, so the operator maintains a commanding view.

A pair of Yamaha F350 outboards is the standard setup, and a third F350 can be added for a maximum 1,050 ponies. Our test boat, however, was rigged with triple F300s, which provided more than enough horsepower and a clean wake for trolling. Top speed was just shy of 52 mph. Pulling back to a comfortable cruising pace, we got more than 1 mile to the gallon, which adds up to an impressive range with the standard 410-gallon fuel capacity.

Neither fishability nor performance need be sacrificed for comfort if you opt for a well-executed cabin boat. And with the new Stamas 390 Aegean, serious anglers don't have to compromise.



PERFORMANCE

PRIME-TIME PLAYER

The 390 Aegean has the range for island-hopping, and rated for up to three 350s, it has the quickness to rush to the hot bite and hold its own in a tournament.

RPM	MPH	GPH
4,000	35.6	36.5
4,500	40.3	45.3
5,000	45.8	58.0
5,500	50.8	78.4
6,000	51.5	79.4

w/ triple F300 outboards



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SPECIES	1st CHOICE	2nd CHOICE	COMMENTS
	Hawaii	Ecuador	**Pacific Blue Marlin:** The blue marlin bite off Kona and Maui remains at peak level; billfish continue to gorge on yellowfin tuna and dorado, both plentiful in area waters at this time. Down in South America, Ecuador's billfish action is highlighted by blue marlin season, starting in Manta this time of year, when warm currents usually come near its shores.
	Portugal	St. Thomas	**Atlantic Blue Marlin:** The Azores and Madeira, off the coast of Portugal, have a long history of producing trophy blues. In fact, both destinations have the potential to produce granders, and the fishing is at its finest this time of year. Boasting the Caribbean's deepest drops, the waters off St. Thomas remain an excellent option for big Atlantic blues.
	Australia	Hawaii	**Black Marlin:** Australia's Great Barrier Reef offers perhaps the world's best chance to tangle with a 1,000-pound black. The big girls make the scene in September, starting on the north end, near Lizard Island, then spreading toward Cairns. Hawaiian waters, where decent numbers of 300- to 500-pounders are on the prowl, provide a good alternative.
	North Carolina	Maryland	**White Marlin:** August and September is when the white marlin fishing gets red hot off the coasts of North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland, with the bite spreading from the Outer Banks north to a seamount called "The Cigar" and to the Norfolk and Washington canyons. Boats out of Hatteras, Port Oregon, Virginia Beach and Ocean City all get in on the action.
	North Carolina	Maryland	**Atlantic Sailfish:** Sails often compete for food with white marlin off the coasts of North Carolina and Maryland, where both species are most plentiful in late summer. Unlike Florida – where kite-fishing with live bait is widely practiced – in the mid-Atlantic, conventional trolling with rigged baits still plays a major role in sailfish tactics.
	Guatemala	Costa Rica	**Pacific Sailfish:** This could be the slowest period for sails in Central America, but the waters of both Guatemala and Costa Rica still yield double-digit releases some days. In Guatemala, game boats all depart from the same general area; in Costa Rica, the fishing stretches from Golfito, near Panama, to Flamingo in the north, where the bite is often better at this time.
	Mexico	Hawaii	**Striped Marlin:** With spots like Finger and Golden Gate banks arguably producing the best year-round striped marlin fishing in the world, Cabo San Lucas easily beats out Ecuador and New Zealand in summer, when the action is not currently peaking. In Hawaii, however, the numbers of stripes are on the rise, making the waters off Kona the next best choice.
	Bermuda	Bahamas	**Wahoo:** Argus and Challenger, Bermuda's fabled offshore banks, are still stacked with hungry wahoo. These fish continue to oblige for as long as the summer weather pattern holds. In the Bahamas, wahoo numbers start building; anglers trolling along steep drops and submerged pinnacles start hooking more as fall approaches.
	Mexico	Hawaii	**Yellowfin Tuna:** If it's yellowfin you're after, Mexico's Pacific is still tops for both numbers and size. To increase your chances for a trophy north of 200 pounds, target the fish with live skipjacks on stout stand-up tackle. Hawaiian waters welcome an influx of yellowfin tuna this time of year, with lots of 70- to 120-pounders available off Oahu and the Big Island.
	Massachusetts	Maine	**Bluefin Tuna:** Packs of big bluefins raid Cape Cod Bay and the nearshore banks off the coasts of Massachusetts and Maine while they fatten up in preparation for their long trek across the Atlantic. Chunking, the preferred way to attract tuna, brings in too many sharks this time of year – deploy just enough chunks to keep your chum line going.

© DIANE ROME PEEBLES

SPECIES	1st CHOICE	2nd CHOICE	COMMENTS
	Bahamas	Belize	**Bonefish:** Lots of fish remain active on Bahamian flats. With high temperatures continuing, best results come both early and late. A heavy shower or a strong incoming tide on oceanside flats, however, can spark a good bite even during midday hours. In Belize, the outer atolls offer more consistent fishing and weather than shallows closer to the mainland.
	Florida	Mexico	**Snook:** It's a great time to target Florida linesiders at night, but strong morning tides also produce excellent catches. Try mangrove island points, dock pilings and the passes and inlets. Lots of beach cruisers remain, providing a solid option when the sun is high. In the Yucatan, the larger lagoons and the surf in Ascension Bay also yield some hefty snook.
	Florida	Mexico	**Tarpon:** A few big fish can be found still hanging out in Florida's Panhandle and Ten Thousand Islands until the first tropical storm sends them on their way. Fishing for juveniles in the 3- to 15-pound class remains consistent in the Keys, the Everglades, Florida's central Gulf Coast, and in the brackish lagoons of the Northern Yucatan.
	Florida	Bahamas	**Permit:** Water temperatures soar in the shallows this time of year; luckily, permit relish the heat. The key is moving water, so look for fish along the edges of flats adjacent to channels during falling spring tides. While not known for permit fishing, the Bahamas still offers good prospects and reliable summer weather on Andros, the Abacos and other islands.
	Louisiana	Florida	**Red Drum:** Sexually mature reds are now gathering in large schools and transitioning to the larger bays before moving out to the Gulf. Use a trolling motor or set up long drifts along outside shorelines, staying some 100 yards from shore, to intercept fish. Florida redfish follow a similar pattern. Look for big schools in wide open flats, in 4 to 8 feet of water.
	Massachusetts	New York	**Striped Bass:** This is prime time to target stripers around Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard. The shallows in the Chatham area also get hot, making for some exciting flats-style sight-fishing for fly and light-tackle anglers. Farther down the coast, Long Island and New York Bight also offer superb fishing for big bass. Pencil poppers and surface swimmers do the trick.
	Florida	Louisiana	**Swordfish:** Summer weather persuades most anglers to target broadbills at night, so cyalume glow sticks and strobes suspended above rigged squid baits become the norm from Fort Lauderdale to Key West. Calm seas are a key factor for swordfishing out in the Gulf of Mexico, so summer is the ideal time to deep-drop for swords at night off the Louisiana coast.
	Louisiana	Texas	**King Mackerel:** The pattern holds in the western Gulf of Mexico, so much of the kingfishing revolves around oil rigs and the mouths of major passes. Right now, anglers consistently catch smokers on topwater plugs. Chumming with small live baits or chunks draws the fish within casting range – then the artificials hit the water.
	Massachusetts	Rhode Island	**Bluefish:** Nantucket and Cape Cod's south shore become big bluefish central, with hordes of fish of 12 pounds or better launching all-out attacks on schooling bunker. Some striper purists hate it when blues take over a spot, but these acrobatic fighters are an exciting second option. Block Island is another top area. Just find the bait pods, and the blues will find you.
	Mexico	North Carolina	**Dolphin:** The Sea of Cortez and the Pacific off Baja continue to produce lots of adult bulls and cows, as well as larger schoolies of 8 to 12 pounds. A run-and-gun approach, using lures for searching, and fishing live baits around floating debris will bag more quality fish. Mild water temperatures and bait migrations also bring plenty of dolphin to North Carolina waters.

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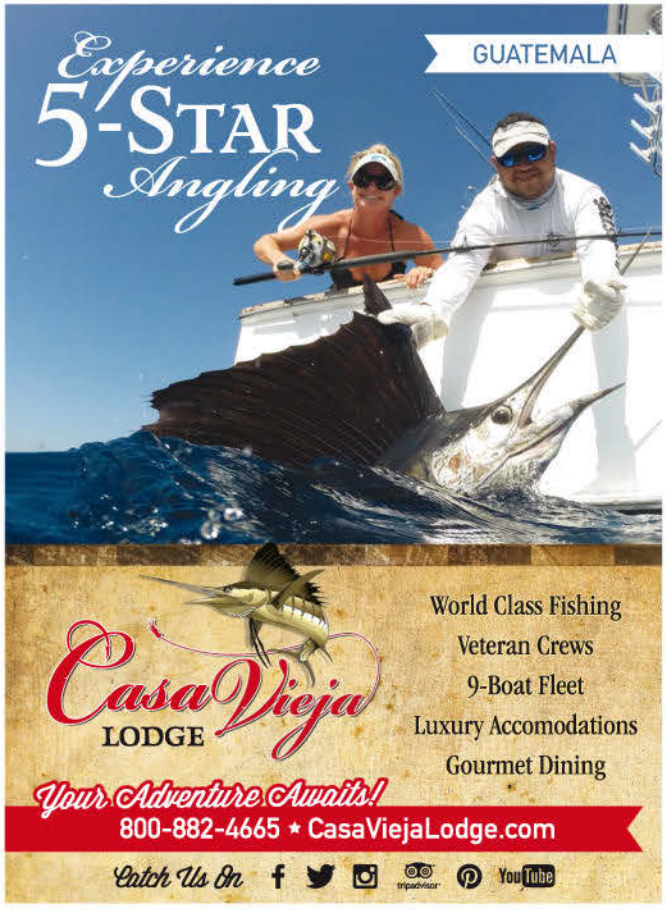
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SHARK PATROL

INNOVATION AND ENTHUSIASM TRUMP WISDOM AND EXPERIENCE.

BY DOUG PIKE

On a June evening in Corpus Christi, Texas, an acquaintance's high school-aged son mentioned shark fishing. From the beach. At night.

"Me and the guys want to catch a big shark," he announced.

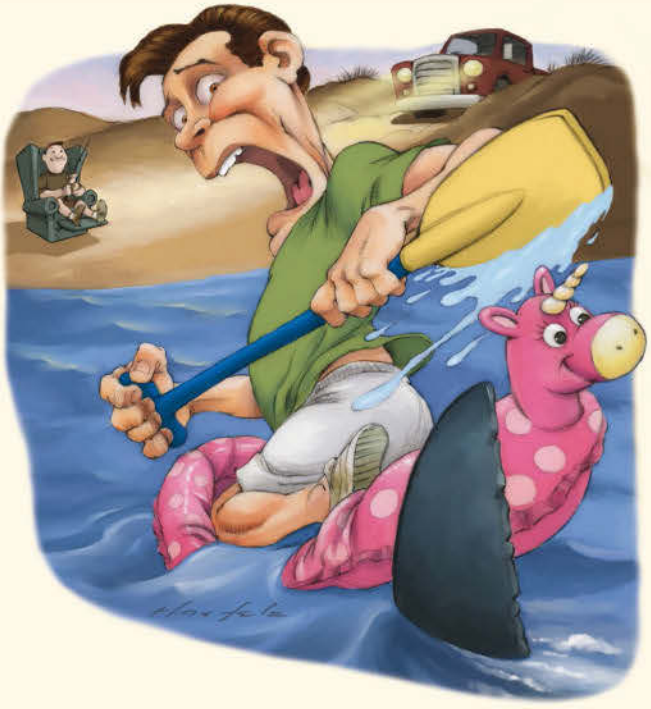
"The guys and I," his father corrected. "Got a plan?"

They did, and it wasn't bad as teenagers' plans go. It included his four-wheel drive pickup (nicknamed Fiddler), two suitable rods from a second guy, a recliner they'd found at the curb on garbage day — which sparked the whole idea — long leaders and big hooks rigged by the third guy, an inflatable raft (dubbed Puffer) "borrowed" from a little sister, and enthusiasm.

For two days, the guys' dads considered what could go wrong — and the remote possibility that their sons might actually catch a shark. Concerns were addressed, assessed and dismissed, and the project earned a green light.

Their first attempt flopped. They hadn't counted on blocks of frozen, ground chum tipping and melting in the back of the truck on the drive down the beach. Or forgetting the raft, which seemed worse than spilled chum — except to the owner of the truck.

There was brief talk opening night of walking their



half-bonito baits out into chest-deep water and slinging them farther, but none of them wanted to be the dude who dragged bloody meat into the surf at night.

The following night went better. They planted the recliner on the beach and, directly in front of it, corkscrewed makeshift rod holders in the damp sand.

They named their positions, so each took equal turns smuggling bloody baits to deep water. Paddler foot-pumped Puffer, loaded it with coiled leaders, baited hooks and chum, then walked it into knee-deep water. He climbed aboard and rowed the raft gingerly — $40 doesn't buy as much inflatable boat as it once did — beyond the truck's reaching headlights.

Line peeled gently from the big reels as the boat wobbled to sea. A horn honk from Spotter indicated that the boat was as far out as the reels allowed. Baits and chum chunks were dropped, and Puffer returned.

And they waited. And waited. Through that night, everyone one of them performed every role a few times — except that of Angler since there'd been nothing to angle. But strong-willed to a man, the trio just kept at it.

As Paddler eased out, Spotter lost focus and let a spool overrun. Angler noticed and said something as the line fell slack, then quickly re-tightened — and wrapped itself snugly around a guide.

At Paddler's end, a steel leader raked the plastic raft, and the tag end of a bad haywire twist punctured Puffer.

Paddler felt life leaving his boat, which, at its best, barely supported his weight and the gear. So he turned immediately for shore.

Seawater slushed in, and bloody, chummy water slushed out of Puffer as Paddler clawed shoreward. The hooked baits were quickly jettisoned. And as the second one hit the water, something extra large ate it. Violently.

Paddler heard the line sizzle through the surface, and faint cheers arose from back near Fiddler. He paddled faster, his boat now looking more like a leaf bag with a pool noodle around its neck.

He hit the beach and ran to Fiddler, where Spotter and Angler were slumped over slack line. The beast had thrown the hook.

So far as I know, they still haven't caught a shark. In the plus column, however, neither has a shark caught any of them.









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